PATTERNS OF POWER · THE FATIMID CALIPHATE

The Fatimid Caliphate

The Complete Study · 909 — 1073 — 1171

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, the problem of its sources, and a map of its fourteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the Fatimid caliphate — from the proclamation at Sijilmasa in August 909, through the settlement of 1073–78 in which an Armenian soldier took the government of Egypt and left the Imamate standing, to the Friday sermon of 10 September 1171 in which a Kurdish vizier read another caliph's name and the last Imam of the age died a few days later without being told.

The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order; the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap; the settlement that divides the spoils among the armed; the formation that installs in a child, before he can refuse it, the map of whom to defer to and whose word to take without checking; the cost column in which each subject prices compliance against defection; the seam that manages the belief on which the whole depends; the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, each man defending the arrangement by defending his own position in it; and, running through all of it, position logic — the proposition that men in like positions converge on like solutions, because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers and hands out an epistemology before it hands out a menu.

The Fatimids were chosen because they isolate three things the series had been carrying without separating.

The first is an order whose founding claim was that the arrangement everyone took for reality was stolen. Most conquerors assert that their rule is rightful. This one asserted that a specific succession, in a specific year, had been usurped, and that everything built on it since — three dynasties, an entire legal establishment, the settled practice of the great majority of Muslims — was error resting on theft. That is a claim of a different logical type, and it makes an unusually sharp demand: it can be made only by someone who is himself the rightful heir, in person, alive and identifiable. The study is largely an account of what that demand cost.

The second is formation that could not be given rather than would not be. The colonial cases in this collection are shaped by a conqueror who declines to form the majority, on the sound reasoning that forming them would oblige him to admit them. Fatimid Egypt is the only case here of an order that was *unable* to form its subjects whatever it wanted, because the content of its doctrine was a graded release of knowledge to sworn adults, and a secret taught to five-year-olds in a village school is not a secret. It possessed the best-funded intellectual establishment of its century and built no elementary schools of its own; and after two hundred and two years of rule, treasury, mosque and courts, its doctrine vanished from Egypt completely while surviving permanently in four countries where it had never held power at all.

The third is that this order and its principal enemy independently arrived at the same constitutional device within one generation, while denouncing each other as frauds. In Baghdad after 1055 and in Cairo after 1073, the sacred office was stripped of government and preserved by the soldiers who ruled in its name — in both cases because a man who cannot occupy an office has no reason to destroy it and every reason to keep it standing, since nobody can raise it against him. That two hostile courts reached the same answer without borrowing is the strongest evidence this collection has that the device is structural rather than cultural.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time: the author brought the framework, the direction and the judgement of the whole and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, verified load-bearing quotations, dates and figures by search against sources reproducing the primary text before any module was written, and produced the drafts, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. A seed written by an earlier Claude supplied a starting spine and was wrong in several places, as seeds are. Where the research contradicted it, the research was followed and the seed was not argued with on the page.

The disciplines

Information asymmetry. The engine throughout is the exact public words set beside the exact words of the ground: the safe-conduct of 969, promising the Egyptians their schools, their fast, their mosques and their protected communities, beside a muster roll of nine corps containing not one Egyptian; the coin legend declaring Ali the most excellent of the legatees, beside the guarantee that the population would go on taking its law from somebody else; the curses ordered onto the doors of the mosques in 1005 beside the order to scrape them off in 1007. The arithmetic is laid out and the sum left to the reader.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly, in the original where the original could be had, with a translation of the collaboration's own. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased, briefly, and credited.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. What could not be verified is dropped or flagged, never guessed — a vivid saying attributed to the first caliph on completing his fortress at Mahdia circulates widely, could not be checked against any source reproducing it, and was dropped rather than used. Contested figures are given as ranges with the compiler named and his distance from the events stated. Where the material supports no figure at all, none is given and the absence is recorded as itself a fact: this study offers no death toll for the great famine, no output figure for the Nubian gold mines, no population figure for Egypt, and no count of the Kutama.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity and both flattery and demonisation are refused. Legibility is not pardon: to show that a caliph's decrees are legible as responses to a field is not to excuse the Church of the Holy Sepulchre coming down. Equally, naming an origin as built is not a debunking — the Sunni and Coptic orders this dynasty ruled were themselves naturalised former conquests, and the people who held them were not dupes.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against evidence, a tendency and never a law, corrected wherever the record refuses it — and this study was refused several times, which is recorded below.

The problem of the sources

This belongs in the front matter rather than the notes, because it governs how everything here should be read.

The narrative spine of Fatimid history reaches a modern reader through compilers who were late and mostly hostile. The largest of them, al-Maqrizi, wrote in Cairo in the fifteenth century — the better part of five hundred years after the conquest of Egypt — under a régime whose own legitimacy rested on the dynasty's suppression having been necessary. Much of what survives of earlier Fatimid historiography survives because such men quoted it, which means it survives as selected and framed by people with a settled view of what they were describing. Where such material is used here it is paraphrased, the compiler named, and his distance stated on the page.

Against that stand three bodies of evidence that are strong, and this study leans on them deliberately and hard.

The first is the sect's own literature. The Ismaili tradition preserved its books in Yemen and in India and they were recovered and edited in the twentieth century; the dynasty's chief judge, al-Qadi al-Nu'man, wrote its law from inside the working state. A doctrine set down by its own jurist while the régime was running is a different order of evidence from a polemic written under the régime that destroyed it, and the difference is kept visible.

The second is the documentary record from the Ben Ezra synagogue at Fustat — private letters, court records, marriage contracts, accounts, petitions, from precisely these centuries, composed to persuade nobody. It supplies this study with a schoolmaster's note about a boy whose writing board was broken, an Alexandrian community's complaint about three named tax officials issuing unregistered receipts, and a merchant's letter from a starving city.

The third is the material record, and it carries the most weight of all because none of it was composed. The coinage, dated and struck in quantity, whose three concentric rings put the dynasty's claim into every market between Córdoba and the Malabar coast. The building inscriptions. The mint distributions, which track the contest for the Saharan gold terminus more reliably than any chronicle. The Nile flood series taken twice a year at a gauge on Rawda island for fiscal reasons and compiled by Toussoun, which shows an epoch of catastrophically low floods running from about 930 to 1070 with acute clusters at 963–969 and 1065–1072 — the two ends of this study. And the archaeology of the gold workings in Wadi Allaqi: the fortified settlements, the inclined washing tables, the tailings, the rotary querns.

The honest statement of this study's weaknesses follows, and it is not short. Everything quoted from the traveller Nasir-i Khusraw — the finest eyewitness account of Fatimid Egypt that survives — comes at one remove, from Charles Schefer's public-domain French translation of 1881, not from the Persian. The founding document of Fatimid Egypt, Jawhar's safe-conduct, is quoted in Arabic in part and summarised at second hand in part, because the full original was not obtained. The al-Azhar foundation inscription reaches this study at two removes, through al-Maqrizi's transcription in Schefer's French. The module on plurality leans on a single modern work, Marina Rustow's study of the Jews of the Fatimid caliphate, more heavily than anything else here. The tax schedule in the module on the cost column comes from a survey of one province made seventy years after the dynasty fell. And the central negative claim of the module on formation — that there was no Ismaili elementary schooling for Egyptian children — is an argument from absence in a period whose administrative archive is largely gone. Each of these is flagged where it is used, and a reader wanting to attack this study should attack it at those six points.

Three traps, named once and refused. The dynasty's descent from Ali is contested and this study does not adjudicate it in either direction; the claim and the eleventh-century denial are treated as acts performed by men in positions, not as findings. The European literature on the Assassins is Crusader hearsay and is evidence about its authors and nobody else; it is kept out. And al-Hakim's madness is a topos of hostile sources descending substantially from one principal narrative; his reign is read first through what his position permitted, required and punished, and the church destructions remain exactly as real when read that way.

Periodisation

The study is dated 909 — 1073 — 1171, and the middle date is an argument.

The obvious hinge is 969, when the dynasty took Egypt. It is not the right one. The conquest changed the order's address, its wealth and its scale, and changed nothing whatever about how it was constituted: the same Imam held the same office on the same terms, with the same claim, over a larger revenue.

What changed the constitution was the night in January 1074 when an Armenian slave's officers went through Cairo killing the leading generals, and the settlement that followed — the vizierate with plenipotentiary powers, the command of the armies, the headship of the religious mission, the caliph's daughter in marriage, the formal transfer of all state business in 1078, and the designation of a son to inherit the whole. After it, the man at the top of the Ismaili world was the object of a religion and the occupant of a household, and Egypt was governed by whoever had the last army through the gate. Everything from 1074 to 1171 is a different constitution wearing the same name, and dating the study on 969 would conceal the only structural change the order underwent in two and a half centuries.

What the study returned

Stated compactly, and argued in the modules: that a grievance which acquires a fixed date in the calendar stops being a grievance and becomes an inheritance, so that to know whether a defeated claim will still be live in a century one asks not how many hold it but whether it has acquired a date; that a conqueror never meets a baseline but a former conquest at some stage of naturalisation, and that where the conquered order has a capturable head the conquest naturalises and where it has none the conqueror pays in force forever; that an apex is switchable only to a claimant who asks for the switch and nothing more, so that a conqueror who narrows his claim at the moment of transfer buys a country at a discount — and that the discount is deepest when the seller

is in the fifth year of a drought; that the design of a capital is a confession about the direction from which the danger is expected, made expensively and early; that a state's untaxed periphery is where its replacement will be recruited, and is untaxed for the same reason it is recruitable; that paying an army in coin from the centre converts every fiscal crisis directly into a military crisis at the capital while paying it in land converts the same crisis into slow decentralisation at the edges, so that the form of military payment predicts the shape of the collapse decades before anything is visible; that an order which will not form the population it rules must also not arm it, and has therefore no one to call on when its own troops turn; that a claim inscribed on a trusted currency travels the length of the trade rather than the reach of the army, and cannot be refused without refusing the money; that a conquering order addresses the conquered in the language of guarantee and the competitor in the language of legitimacy, and where it appears to argue with its own subjects one should check whether the argument asks anything of them; that withheld formation has two distinct causes, of which only one is a choice, because a doctrine whose content is graded release under oath is structurally incapable of installing a world-picture in children — so that esotericism and mass formation are alternatives and an order may have exactly one; that the diagnostic is the elementary school and not the library, and that an apparatus running on a payroll is not formation, since formation is precisely what continues when nobody is paying for it; that the most durable formation is the part of a world-picture nobody experiences as a belief — the year, the alphabet, the rite performed on infants — and that anything a government could install by decree it can delete by decree and is therefore decoration; that a régime's guarantees map its enforcement reach rather than its intentions, so that the guarantee conspicuously not given marks where its writ stops; that exit must be measured at the level of the man actually doing the taxing rather than at the frontier; that social pressure is the cheapest enforcement in existence and that a state and a community will each convert the other's pressure into it; that what determines whether an extractive order develops institutions of consent is not how much it takes but how many of its revenue sources could refuse, transit tolls and mines and people who are themselves property being the least institution-forming income there is; that an exceptional archive does not merely add evidence but reweights the whole picture toward whatever it records, so conclusions should be anchored on sources nobody composed; that a seam which is doctrinally required rather than merely practised cannot be closed, and an order forbidden by its own theology to say what it believes cannot form anybody; that a rich record of successful petitions is usually evidence of the absence of consent rather than its presence, petition being what a ruler offers instead of representation; that a default holds only where the positions inside it

are complements, and that rulers manufacture rivalrous positions deliberately as a safety device without seeing that the control mechanism and the fracture line are the same institution; that an office nobody can take is a liability while it must govern and an asset once it need not, and that where such an office is filled by designation the governing office must not be able to designate, or the fork is not a risk but a scheduled event; that factional fights produce durable institutions because two claimants force the arbiter to write down what he is awarding; that plurality survives robustly where it is the source of the arbiter's leverage, and that a subordinate community's power to coerce its own members is capped at the state backing it can command against them; that the mechanisms of structural change run in sequence rather than as alternatives, conquest by a rival elite coming last and by invitation from a faction that is losing; that popular violence functions as an input to elite repricing rather than as a cause of change, and that where a source describes a population doing what only an army can do one should look for the commanders; that the metabolic note is called not by the size of the environmental shock but by the state of the coordinating apparatus when it lands, so that the men who broke the coordination were paid in silver and the debt was settled in the villages; that an accounting built from battles systematically undercounts orders whose principal violence was administrative; that the forgetting is local, and a conqueror who buys a country rather than storming it purchases immunity from memory along with the peace; and that the honest output of such an accounting is not a verdict but a distribution, because the people in the two columns are not the same people and in places one column physically produced the other.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape — the two societies on the eve. The Tenth of Muharram. A succession dispute in 632, a killing at Karbala in 680, and the annual liturgy that carried it for three centuries until a Buyist soldier licensed it publicly in Baghdad six years before Jawhar crossed the Nile; an Ifriqiya where the Arab conquest had never taken; and an Egypt where it had taken so completely that Amr's letter of 641, telling the Coptic patriarch to resume the government of his nation, had become the way the world was.

1 — The Floor of Force. The Victorious Troops and the Triumphant Armies. A country fought for over seven years by a missionary's Berber cavalry and a town massacred the day after it surrendered; a capital built on a rock with one gate, facing the province it had just taken; a country bought in five months with a written guarantee

and one engagement at a river crossing; and the prize in Baghdad that fell into the dynasty's hands once, by accident, and could not be picked up.

2 — The Settlement. Not Even for a Single Dinar. A city whose lanes were named after the regiments that built them, a muster roll of nine corps containing not one Egyptian, high offices held by slaves and Greeks, accounts kept by Copts and Jews, and a traveller's flat statement that the treasury never made an assignment on any taxpayer for so much as one dinar.

3 — The Robe. The Most Excellent of the Legatees. The claim minted in three concentric rings on the purest gold in the world and carried by trade into the competitor's own markets; the same design carved over a mosque door on the processional avenue; and the reply from Baghdad in 1011, which needed the signatures of the Prophet's family and was issued the year after an Iraqi amir defected.

4 — Formation. The Boy Whose Board Was Broken. Three complete apparatuses for making an Egyptian child, all older than the dynasty and all guaranteed by its founding document; a fiscal year the Muslim treasury kept in pharaonic months; sessions of wisdom in a palace hall with a course laid on for foreign visitors and none for the village; and a doctrine that vanished from the one country it governed and survived in four where it never had a soldier.

5 — The Cost Column. A Net Across the Door. What the cultivator, the Coptic villager, the artisan and the merchant paid and what it bought them; poll-tax collectors the government's own register calls beast-chasers; a state that guaranteed a man's property absolutely and his life not at all; one in four registered non-Muslims in a province recorded as having gone elsewhere; and seven years in which both columns emptied at once and nobody rose.

6 — Extraction. Three Hundred and Sixty a Year. A land tax that was a function of the flood, gold and emeralds dug by slaves on washing tables in the Nubian desert, a treaty that delivered human beings northward for six centuries, an Indian Ocean trade route relocated into Egyptian customs houses — and not one revenue stream whose payer could have refused.

7 — Information and Suppression. Written on the Doors of the Mosques. The one number the whole country waited for, read at one well on one island; a postal service whose director was also the master of news; an asymmetry written into the theology rather than merely practised; and two years in which a government inscribed curses on its own mosques and then scraped them off.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. Everything Except the Caliphate. A civil administration of complements that held through famine and civil war, an army of substitutes that destroyed the state the first time the pot would not stretch, a purchased

Armenian who took the government and the mission and left the one office he could not hold, and the moment in 1094 when a vizier chose which son would be the Imam of the age.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. Glory of the Two Parties. No assembly, no consent, no counterweight, and the great property shelter of the Islamic world run as a government department — against half a dozen legal systems operating at once, a four-year schism over a rabbinic chair that forced the chancery to define a jurisdiction, and a ban that could not be pronounced because the men it would have struck were better connected than the men proposing it.

10 — Change and Collapse. Each Time He Was Invited. Two hundred and sixty-two years without a single structural change produced by cultivators or artisans; a rising that destroyed a palace city and altered nothing until an emir did a sum thirty years later; a cavalry confederation that unmade a state; and three expeditions from Syria, every one of them requested by a man inside the arrangement who was losing.

11 — The Grim Accounting. The Granary Asked for Grain. What the sword cost where it fell, and the far larger violence that produced no battle because nobody fought; the granary of Rome asking Constantinople for grain in 1054 and getting it; the same shock eleven years later arriving while the army fought itself; and a conquest whose founding violence had been done to other people in another country, and which therefore needed no forgetting.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. Two Caliphs in Cages. Two hostile caliphates arriving independently at one constitutional device; a fork performed by the office's own protector; the one thing this case shows that nothing else in the collection does; and the strongest case for the defence, stated at full weight in its own voice and answered without netting the columns.

Corrections

This project's claim on a reader is that it says where it is thin, so the corrections made during the build are recorded here rather than absorbed.

Two reach backwards and alter earlier modules. The module on extraction found that revenue assignments plainly existed in Fatimid Egypt — the caliph's sister held them, worth some hundred thousand dinars a year including a share of customs, in the year 1000 — which narrows the claim made in the module on the settlement to its defensible form: the *army* was not maintained on assignments, which is what the evidence supports and what the argument needs. And the module on the grim accounting found the drought cluster of 963–969 sitting underneath the Egyptian political collapse that made the 969 conquest cheap; the module on the floor of force

had credited the disappearance of Abbasid relief and the death of Kafur, both true and both downstream of five years of low water in a state whose revenue is a function of the flood.

One was an error of framing rather than fact, and it was caught by the author. A draft of the module on collapse described the Banu Hilal as tens of thousands of ordinary people and treated them as a hard case the framework had to survive. A confederation fielding three thousand cavalry under named hereditary emirs is a military establishment, not a peasantry; the episode is a straightforward confirmation of the collection's account of where structural change comes from, and manufacturing a difficulty in order to rescue the framework from it was special pleading. The module was rewritten, and what the case actually exposes — a trap in a vocabulary that describes armed interests in the language of populations — is now its finding.

Smaller items, none load-bearing: the day of Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i's execution is given as 18 February in most modern accounts and 28 February in some, and is given here only as February 911; the Julian date of Ghadir Khumm is given as 10 or 16 March 632; the battle against the Qarmatians outside Cairo is dated by some accounts to December 970 and by others to the winter of 971; al-Basasiri's death is given as January 1059 and January 1060, of which the later is the coherent reading; Schefer's conversion of the hijri date for the tracing of the Cairo enclosure appears to be a slip and the precise day is avoided; his date for the completion of al-Azhar is a year late; the widely repeated claim that Egyptian governments falsified the Nilometer readings could not be verified and is not asserted; the causal link drawn between the erasure of the curse inscriptions in 1007 and the defeat of Abu Rakwa is an inference from sequence and not a statement in any source; and the 1054 Byzantine grain figure does not internally reconcile, so only the direction of the shipment is used.

A note on sources.

This front matter is descriptive and makes no primary-source claims of its own; every factual assertion summarised here is sourced in the module that carries it, in that module's own closing note. The six structural weaknesses set out above under *The problem of the sources* apply to the whole and are repeated in the modules where they bite. Readers should note in addition that this study consulted no manuscript and no archive, and rests throughout on published primary texts in public-domain editions — chiefly B. T. A. Evetts's *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* in the *Patrologia Orientalis*, Charles Schefer's edition of Nasir-i Khusraw's *Safarnama*, the Arabic of the Baghdad manifesto as preserved by Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Suyuti and al-Maqrizi, and the published catalogues of the Fatimid coinage — supplemented by

digitised Geniza catalogues and by modern scholarship paraphrased and credited, principally Farhad Daftary, Heinz Halm, Paul Walker, Shainool Jiwa, Michael Brett, S. D. Goitein, Marina Rustow, Yaacov Lev, Hassanein Rabie and Fekri Hassan. Where this study draws on other studies in this collection — the Seljuks and the Abbasid caliphate, the Christendom sequence, and al-Andalus — it says so and credits them rather than re-verifying their findings.

LANDSCAPE

The Tenth of Muharram

The landscape — the succession dispute that made this dynasty thinkable, the two older conquests it moved against, and what each party could see from where it stood in the 960s.

What the evidence will carry, and what it will not

This study runs on the exact words of public-domain primary sources, quoted in the original where the original can be had. On this subject the discipline holds better than it did on the last one, and it holds unevenly, and the unevenness has to be described before anything is built on it.

The narrative spine of Fatimid history reaches a modern reader through compilers who were late and mostly hostile. The largest of them, al-Maqrizi, wrote in Cairo in the fifteenth century — the better part of five hundred years after the conquest of Egypt — under a Mamluk regime whose own legitimacy rested on the dynasty's suppression having been necessary. A great deal of what survives of earlier Fatimid historiography survives because al-Maqrizi and others like him quoted it, which means it survives as selected and framed by men with a settled view of what they were describing. Where such material is used here it will be paraphrased, the compiler named, and his distance from the events stated on the page.

Against that stand three bodies of evidence that are strong, and the study leans on them hard. The first is the sect's own literature. The Ismaili tradition preserved its books in Yemen and in India and they were recovered and edited in the twentieth century; the dynasty's chief jurist, al-Qadi al-Nu'man, died in the 970s having written the sect's law from inside the working state. The modern editions are in copyright and must be paraphrased, but a doctrine set down by its own jurist while the regime was running is a different order of evidence from a polemic written under the regime that destroyed it, and the difference will be kept visible. The second is the documentary record from the Ben Ezra synagogue at Fustat — private letters, court records, marriage contracts, accounts, business correspondence, from precisely these centuries, composed to persuade nobody of anything. The third is the material record: the coinage, whose legends are dated and struck in quantity; the dated building inscriptions; and the Nile flood series, which is a run of numbers taken annually by officials for fiscal reasons and not composed as a narrative at all.

And for the older conquest that lies underneath this one, there is a fourth body, and it is the best-placed witness this landscape has. The *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, compiled from Coptic and Greek materials by Severus, bishop of al-Ashmunain, in the very decades this study opens on, was edited with its Arabic text and translated into English by B. T. A. Evetts in the *Patrologia Orientalis* between 1904 and 1915, and is out of copyright. It is a partisan ecclesiastical document written by the losing confession of a conquered country, and its partisanship is exactly what makes it useful, because it records what the conquest looked like from underneath.

Three arguments about the present attach themselves to this dynasty, and all three are named here once and then refused.

The first is the genealogy. The Fatimids claimed descent from Ali and Fatima, and therefore from the Prophet; the claim was denied in their own lifetime by a manifesto issued at Baghdad and signed by jurists, and modern scholarship has gone both ways on it. This study cannot adjudicate it and will not try. What it can do is observe that the assertion and the denial were both *acts*, performed by men in positions, at datable moments, for reasons that can be reconstructed — and it will treat them as acts rather than as findings.

The second is the Assassins. The Nizari Ismailis who broke from Cairo in 1094 generated a European literature of drugged killers and a mountain paradise which is Crusader hearsay almost end to end, and which is evidence about the people who wrote it and about nobody else. It is kept out.

The third is al-Hakim's madness. He did extraordinary things, several of them well attested; he is also the villain of every hostile tradition and the object of a religious movement that outlived him. His reign will be read first for what his position permitted, required and punished, and only afterwards, if at all, for pathology.

The tenth of Muharram

The order this study examines is unintelligible if it is entered in tenth-century Ifriqiya, because its founding claim is not that its rulers were legitimate. Its founding claim is that the rightful line had returned after an interruption of two hundred and fifty years, and that everything in between had been usurpation. That is a claim about a specific afternoon in the year 632 and about a specific morning in the year 680, and it has to be laid out properly or the whole dynasty looks like an eccentricity.

Muhammad died at Medina in June 632 without a son who survived him and, on the majority account, without naming a successor. What happened next was fast and contested. While his family were preparing the body, a body of Medinan and Meccan

Muslims met in the portico of the Banu Sa'ida and acclaimed Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law and companion, as *khalifa* — deputy, successor. Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, the husband of his daughter Fatima, and the father of his only surviving grandsons, was not in the portico. He took the office twenty-four years later, fourth in the sequence, after Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman.

There was a competing account almost immediately, and it turned on an episode three months before the death. Returning from the farewell pilgrimage, at a watering place called Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet is reported to have taken Ali by the hand before the assembled pilgrims and said:

> من كنت مولاه فعليّ مولاه
> *"He whose mawlā I am, Ali is his mawlā."*

The tradition is transmitted in both Sunni and Shi'i collections, in many variants, and it is one of the most heavily attested single utterances in the corpus. What it *means* is the entire dispute, because *mawlā* will carry the sense of friend, patron, client, and master, and the two readings — Ali is dear to me, and Ali holds the authority I hold — are both available in the word. The date, 18 Dhu'l-Hijja of the year 10, corresponds to March 632. It became a feast.

Ali's caliphate lasted five years and was fought throughout. Uthman was murdered in Medina in 656; Ali succeeded him and was immediately opposed, first by a coalition defeated at the Battle of the Camel, then by Mu'awiya, the governor of Syria and Uthman's kinsman, who demanded vengeance for the murder and would not give allegiance. The two armies met at Siffin in 657 and the battle was broken off for arbitration; a body of Ali's own supporters seceded in fury at the arbitration and became the Kharijites, who held that the community's headship belonged to whoever was most fit for it, of any descent whatever, and that a ruler who sinned forfeited it. In 661 a Kharijite murdered Ali in the mosque at Kufa. Mu'awiya took the caliphate, and did the thing that turned a succession dispute into a permanent structural quarrel: before his death in 680 he secured allegiance for his own son, Yazid. The office had been contested, then appointed, then arbitrated. Now it was inherited.

Husayn ibn Ali — second son of Ali, son of Fatima, grandson of the Prophet — refused allegiance to Yazid, left Medina for Mecca, and then set out for Kufa on the invitation of its Shi'a, who had written to him. The Umayyad governor of Iraq took Kufa in hand before Husayn arrived, executed his cousin and agent there, and sent cavalry into the desert. Husayn's party — his household, some seventy or so armed men on the traditional count — was intercepted on the plain of Karbala, cut off from the Euphrates, and destroyed on the tenth day of the month of Muharram in the year 61,

which is the tenth of October 680. Husayn was killed with his sons, his brothers, his nephews and his companions. His head was carried to the governor at Kufa and thence to Damascus. The women and children of the Prophet's house were taken through Iraq and Syria as captives.

Read as politics, this is a small engagement: a claimant with seventy men against a state, an outcome that was never in doubt, and a dynasty confirmed in power for another seventy years. Read structurally, it is something else, and the something else is what the rest of this study is about. Karbala did not fade on the ordinary schedule of political grievances. It acquired a date.

A grievance that acquired a calendar

The first pilgrimages to the grave are reported within a few years of the killing. Public processions came very much later, and the earliest recorded instance can be dated exactly, and its date is worth holding against everything that follows in this study.

On the tenth of Muharram in the year 352 — the eighth of February 963 — the Buyid amir of Iraq, Mu'izz al-Dawla, ordered the markets of Baghdad closed and public mourning performed for Husayn. The chroniclers report shops shut, black worn, tents raised in the bazaars, women in the streets with their hair loose and their faces blackened, beating their heads. The report reaches us through Ibn al-Jawzi in the twelfth century and Ibn al-Athir in the thirteenth, both of them Sunnis writing well afterwards and neither of them sympathetic. The year before, the same amir had permitted Baghdad to keep the feast of Ghadir in public.

Take the position of the man who gave the order. Mu'izz al-Dawla was a Daylamite soldier, the son of a fisherman, who had marched into Baghdad in 945 and taken the Abbasid caliph into custody — he deposed and blinded one in 946 — and who ruled Iraq as a Shi'i commander over a Sunni city in the name of a Sunni caliph he had reduced to a signature. He was not spreading a doctrine to a population that would receive it gladly; the Baghdad processions produced riots between the quarters for the next two centuries. What he was doing was cheaper and more precise. He was licensing a public performance that his own troops and his own confession already held sacred, in the capital of the office he had captured but could not claim, and he was paying nothing for it beyond the disorder.

The important thing here is not Mu'izz al-Dawla. It is the state of the world his order reveals. By the middle of the tenth century the killing at Karbala had been going into children for nearly three hundred years — into the fasts, the visits to the graves, the recitations, the names given to sons — and had reached the point where a soldier who wanted a public liturgy for it did not have to build one. It was already there, waiting for

permission. A political defeat had been converted into an item of the calendar, and an item of the calendar is not a grievance that adults hold. It is a world-picture that children are given before they can weigh it, and which they will afterwards defend as they defend the shape of the year.

That is the condition the Fatimids were built on, and it is why a dynasty could raise armies in the Maghrib on a claim about Medina in 632.

The line, and where it broke

The Shi'a held that authority passed by designation — *naṣṣ*, an explicit appointment — within the descendants of Ali, and that the designated Imam was the authoritative interpreter of the revelation. It is a doctrine about knowledge before it is a doctrine about power: it holds that the sacred text does not interpret itself, that the community cannot be trusted to read it, and that God therefore leaves in every generation one man whose reading is the reading. Almost everything the Fatimid state later did follows from that proposition, including the parts of it that look like eccentricity.

The line ran from Ali through Husayn and his descendants, in Medina, mostly quietist, mostly under surveillance. It broke twice in ways that matter here.

It broke first on the death of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, at Medina in the year 148 — 765. Ja'far was the most respected teacher of his generation; men who founded Sunni legal schools sat with him. He had designated his eldest son, Isma'il, and Isma'il had predeceased him, and at his death three of his sons claimed the succession at once and none could produce a clear designation. The majority came in time to follow the younger son, Musa al-Kazim, and through him to a line of five more Imams ending in the disappearance of the twelfth in 873; they are the Twelvers, and they are the Shi'a of Mu'izz al-Dawla's Baghdad and of Iran today. A minority held to the original designation — that a *naṣṣ*, once given, cannot be withdrawn — and followed Isma'il's son Muhammad ibn Isma'il. They are the Isma'ilis, and the Fatimids are theirs.

This is worth pausing over, because it fixes something about the position the dynasty would occupy that is easy to miss. A Fatimid caliph was not a Shi'i ruler facing a Sunni world. He was the head of one branch of the Shi'a, whose claim was rejected by the other branch, whose founding act had been the rejection of the man the other branch followed, and who therefore had two arguments to win rather than one. Mu'izz al-Dawla, holding Baghdad and mourning Husayn in the streets, was no more a Fatimid ally than the Abbasid whose eyes he had put out.

It broke a second time, and worse, in the eighth century, on a betrayal.

In 750 the Umayyads were destroyed by a revolution that came out of Khurasan under a black banner and a slogan. The slogan was not a name. It was:

الرضا من آل محمد
"the one agreed upon from the Family of Muhammad."

That formula was doing a very precise job, and it can be read straight off the position of the men who chose it. A movement recruiting simultaneously among Alid loyalists, disappointed Khurasani soldiers and Arab settlers with fiscal grievances could not name a candidate without losing half its coalition; a formula that named no one let every faction supply the name it preferred. When the Umayyads fell, the family that took the caliphate was not Ali's but that of the Prophet's uncle Abbas — kin to the Prophet, but not of the line the Alids had been dying for. Within twelve years the Hasanid brothers Muhammad, called the Pure Soul, and Ibrahim rose against the second Abbasid caliph in Medina and Basra, and were destroyed inside four months; Muhammad was killed in December 762, Ibrahim in January 763, and a general campaign of imprisonment and killing against the Alids followed. Alid risings continued for a century and a half and were put down, one at a time, by an empire that had come to power on their grievance.

Set the two facts beside each other, because the whole later structure sits on the gap between them. The public claim of the Abbasid revolution was the restoration of the Prophet's family. The delivered outcome, for the branch of that family which had been killed for three generations, was a police régime. A movement which had run on a formula that named no one was in no position to complain when the formula was cashed for someone else — but the men it had recruited had heard a name in it, and they remembered.

The Fatimid claim is the collection of that debt. It is not "we are legitimate rulers." It is "the rightful line has returned, and everything since Karbala has been theft" — a claim that is genealogical and eschatological at once, and that commits its holder to things an ordinary dynasty is not committed to. Working out what those commitments cost is much of what this study is for.

The century underground, and the year the doctrine changed

After the failed risings the Isma'ili line went out of sight. What can be established about the ninth century is thin and mostly reconstructed backwards from later polemic and later insider writing, and it should be held loosely: a leadership that moved from Khuzistan to Syria and settled at Salamiyya; a network of missionaries — *dāʿīs*, summoners — appearing in the 870s across southern Iraq, Persia, Yemen, Sind and the Maghrib; and a teaching that the seventh Imam, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, was in concealment and would return as the Mahdi to establish justice and reveal the inner

meaning of the law. The chief missionary in the Kufan countryside, an ox-driver named Hamdan, called Qarmat, ran the Iraqi mission with his brother-in-law Abdan; the converts they made were called after him, and the name Qarmatian stuck.

This is an organisation, not a sect in the ordinary sense: a hierarchy of summoners under a hidden head, recruiting individually, teaching in stages, moving money and men across the frontiers of four states. It was built for waiting, and its whole coherence rested on a promise that a specific absent person would return.

In 899, the man who had just assumed the leadership at Salamiyya, Sa'id ibn al-Husayn, changed the promise. New instructions went out to the missionaries in a different tone, and the substance of the change was that the Imamate belonged to him, in the present, in person; his predecessors in the leadership had been Imams too, concealing their rank out of prudence, and the names of Isma'il and Muhammad ibn Isma'il had served as cover. The awaited one was not coming back. He had arrived.

Abdan was sent from Iraq to Salamiyya to find out what was happening, came back convinced, and he and Hamdan Qarmat broke with the centre and stopped the mission. Abdan was murdered shortly afterwards by a summoner loyal to Salamiyya; Hamdan disappeared. The Iraqi, Bahraini and Persian communities that refused the new doctrine kept the old expectation and the old name, and one of them founded a state on the Gulf that would spend the next century as the most dangerous enemy the Fatimids had.

Read that year through what its author could see, and it stops looking like theology and starts looking like arithmetic. Sa'id ibn al-Husayn had inherited a network whose asset was an expectation and whose liability was that expectations decay; a hidden Imam who fails to appear for a hundred and thirty years is a wasting asset, and the missionaries in the field were the men who had to keep selling him. What a claim in the present bought was a living authority who could give orders, be obeyed, hold property, and — this is the part that mattered within ten years — be proclaimed. What it cost was the men whose entire formation had been the waiting. He paid that price, and it is the first thing this dynasty is recorded as having done: it split its own movement, permanently, before it had a state.

The Abbasid police took an interest in Salamiyya soon after, and Sa'id left it. He went to Ramla, then to Fustat in Egypt, and finally, in about 905, to the caravan city of Sijilmasa on the northern edge of the Sahara, where he lived quietly as a merchant. He was in Egypt, in transit, sixty-four years before his great-grandson's army took it.

Ifriqiya: an order sixty years old

Meanwhile a summoner sent west had done what no one in the movement's history had managed.

Abu Abdallah al-Husayn, called al-Shi'i, was a Kufan recruited into the mission with his brother, sent first to Yemen, and then, in 893 or 894, present at Mecca during the pilgrimage when a party of Kutama Berbers came through. He presented himself as a Yemeni, fell into conversation, and learned two things that decided the next fifteen years: that the Kutama of the Lesser Kabylie lived in mountains the Aghlabid government of Ifriqiya did not effectively reach, and that they could put a great many armed men in the field. They invited him home.

What he found there is the first half of this study's landscape, and it needs to be read as a conqueror would have read it.

Ifriqiya in the 890s was itself a naturalised conquest, and an incomplete one. Arab armies had come west in the seventh century; Uqba ibn Nafi founded Qayrawan as a garrison in 670 and was killed by a Berber and Byzantine coalition in 683; the province was not securely held until the 690s. Within two generations the settlement broke. In 740 the Berbers of the far west rose against Umayyad taxation under Kharijite preaching — the doctrine, conveniently to hand, that headship belonged to the most fit of any descent, which is an excellent doctrine for a conquered people whose conquerors are ranking them by Arab pedigree — and the Umayyads never recovered the western Maghrib. What emerged instead was a belt of Berber Kharijite states: the Ibadi imamate at Tahert from 776, ruled by an elected line of Persian descent; the Midrarids at Sijilmasa; scattered communities in the Nafusa mountains and on Djerba that are there still.

Ifriqiya proper stayed with the caliphate, and in 800 the Abbasid caliph handed it to Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab as a hereditary governorship in exchange for tribute. The Aghlabids ruled it for a hundred and nine years from Qayrawan and from the palace suburb of Raqqada, struck their own gold, took Sicily from the Byzantines across three-quarters of a century, and presided over the establishment of the Maliki school of law as the settled law of the country — the school whose great Ifriqiyan authority, Sahnun, had died at Qayrawan in 854, and whose jurists were the men who certified who was and was not a Muslim in good standing in every town of the province.

So the country Abu Abdallah entered had a two-hundred-year-old Arab-Islamic settlement in its cities, a Maliki legal establishment with a monopoly on orthodoxy, an Arab dynasty whose army had been mutinying against it for a century, and a mountain population that had been ignoring the whole arrangement and had once, in living memory of its grandfathers, nearly destroyed it. The Kutama were not Ibadi — the

Tahert imamate lay to their west, not among them — which meant they were the one substantial armed body in the region not already spoken for by a rival doctrine.

That is a position with one obvious move in it, and Abu Abdallah made it. He settled at Ikjan from about 902, taught, arbitrated, drilled, and turned a tribal confederation into an army. Mila fell in 902, Sétif in 904, Belezma in 905; in 907 and 908 he came down into the plains and took Tobna, Baghai, Tébessa and Constantine; in the spring of 909 he broke the last Aghlabid army in the field. Ziyadat Allah III left for the east on the twenty-fifth of March and the Kutama entered Raqqada. Abu Abdallah proclaimed an amnesty and distributed the spoils, and then named his master.

Then he went to fetch him. The column reached Sijilmasa on the twenty-sixth of August 909 and took the city; Sa'id ibn al-Husayn, who had been placed under house arrest there when the emir heard what was coming, was brought out and proclaimed as Imam and caliph with the regnal style *al-Mahdī bi'llāh*, the rightly guided one by God. He entered Raqqada in January 910.

Fourteen months later he had Abu Abdallah killed.

The sources on both sides agree on the fact and differ on the reason; the Ismaili tradition holds that the summoner and his brother conspired against the Imam, and the hostile tradition holds that the summoner had discovered his Mahdi was a man. Either way the position explains the act without any need to settle motive. Abu Abdallah had made the Kutama, commanded them for fifteen years, and was the only person in Ifriqiya they had ever obeyed; al-Mahdi had arrived from a prison in the desert with a genealogy and no army. Two men cannot both be the indispensable one, and the one with the doctrine outlived the one with the troops. Abu Abdallah was killed in February 911, by a Kutama commander.

What followed is the fact this landscape most needs on the record. The Fatimids spent the next four decades failing to hold the country they had taken. There were Kutama revolts and Berber revolts and Arab urban revolts; there were three failed invasions of Egypt, in 914–15, in 919–21, and again in the 930s, each of which took Alexandria easily and could not take Fustat. And in 944 an Ibadi Berber preacher of the Banu Ifran, Abu Yazid Makhlad ibn Kaydad — known then and since as صاحب الحمار, *ṣāḥib al-ḥimār*, the Man on the Donkey, for the beast he rode — came out of the Aurès and very nearly finished the dynasty. He took Béja and Tébessa and Kairouan, destroyed a Kutama army, and besieged the Fatimid caliph in his island fortress at Mahdia. The second caliph died in 946 with the revolt still running. It took the third until August 947 to hunt Abu Yazid into a mountain fortress and take him.

One detail from that war belongs here rather than later. When the town of al-Aribus surrendered to Abu Yazid in August 944, it received a written safe-conduct for its inhabitants — and the safe-conduct explicitly excluded Fatimid officials and all adherents of Ismailism from its protection. Thirty-five years after the proclamation, in the dynasty's own capital province, being of the ruler's confession was a category a besieged town could name in a surrender document as the thing it was not obliged to spare.

By 969 the order had recovered. The fourth caliph, al-Mu'izz, had come to the throne in 953 at twenty-one; his general Jawhar had gone west in 958 and taken Sijilmasa and Fez and reached the Atlantic, striking coin in the caliph's name at the caravan terminus; Sicily was held; the capital had moved to a new palace city, al-Mansuriya, outside Qayrawan. But the order was sixty years old, it had never converted the country it sat on, and its own doctrine was carried by a Berber army and a corps of missionaries and by almost nobody else.

Egypt: an order three hundred years old

The country to the east was a different kind of object entirely, and the difference is the point of this section.

Egypt had been conquered in 641 by an army under Amr ibn al-As, and the conquest had come at the end of a decade in which the country's majority confession had been under systematic pressure from its own government. The Egyptian church had refused the Council of Chalcedon of 451 and its formula concerning the two natures of Christ; the imperial church had accepted it; and after Heraclius recovered Egypt from the Persians he sent out a man to end the schism. The Coptic account is exact about what that man was:

> *"And he sent a governor to the land of Egypt, named Cyrus, to be prefect and patriarch at the same time."*

For ten years Cyrus held both offices. The Coptic patriarch Benjamin went into hiding in Upper Egypt and instructed his bishops to do the same; those who did not, the same source records, were caught "some of them through persecution, and some by bribes and honours, and some by persuasion and deceit," and two named bishops conformed. Benjamin's brother Mennas was tortured with lighted torches, had his teeth broken, and was drowned in a sack of sand.

Then the Arabs arrived, and what they did with the apparatus is the most consequential fact in the pre-history of Fatimid Egypt.

They did not dismantle it. The same compilation preserves what Egyptian Christians understood the rule of engagement to be — reported, note, in the words of the conquered rather than the conquerors:

> *"As for the province of Egypt and any city that agrees with its inhabitants to pay the land-tax to you, and to submit to your authority, make a treaty with them, and do them no injury. But plunder and take as prisoners those that will not consent to this and resist you."*

And when Amr had Alexandria, and the Chalcedonian prefect-patriarch had killed himself with a poisoned ring, a Coptic officer told him where the real patriarch was. Amr wrote to the provinces of Egypt:

> *"There is protection and security for the place where Benjamin, the patriarch of the Coptic Christians is, and peace from God; therefore let him come forth secure and tranquil, and administer the affairs of his Church, and the government of his nation."*

Benjamin came out of the desert after thirteen years and was brought before the conqueror, who received him with honour and said:

> *"Resume the government of all thy churches and of thy people, and administer their affairs."*

This is a partisan document and it must be read as one. It was compiled by Coptic churchmen who had every reason to establish that their hierarchy's restoration had been lawful, honourable, and personally blessed by the conqueror, and the *History of the Patriarchs* is not a neutral record of what Amr thought he was doing. But it is very good evidence of the instrument, because the instrument is the same whichever party describes it. A conqueror of a country whose population was overwhelmingly of another confession, holding it with a force too small to police it, found that confession already possessed of a complete apparatus for reaching every child in the country — a rite performed on infants, a calendar, a liturgy, a language, a network of bishops under a single head — and an apparatus whose head had spent ten years being hunted by the previous government. He did not break it. He put its head back on his throne and told him to govern his nation.

The bill for that arrived in instalments, and the instalments are what turned a conquest into a settlement. Consider what the arrangement looked like from underneath two generations later, under the Umayyad governor Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Malik, who held Egypt from about 705. The same Coptic compilation records that he

seized the patriarch Alexander and held him until three thousand dinars were paid; that he took the customary tax and demanded double, "requiring a dinar and two thirds from those who were bound to pay one dinar, so that many churches were ruined for that cause"; that he had the young men of the country registered and branded on their hands and foreheads; and that he ordered that no dead man be buried until the poll-tax had been paid for him, appointing an official over the business, so that even the destitute lay unburied without his warrant.

Around the same reign the chancery of Egypt went over from Greek and Coptic to Arabic. Coptic revolts followed through the eighth and into the ninth century, the last great one in the Delta marshes in 831, put down by the caliph al-Ma'mun in person with the Coptic patriarch brought along to talk the rebels out of their swamps. After that there were no more.

And in 861 the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil rebuilt the gauge in the river. The Nilometer that stands on the southern tip of Rawda island — a marble column graduated in nineteen cubits, in a stone-lined well fed by the Nile through three levels of tunnel, its walls carved with Kufic verses about water and vegetation — was designed by the astronomer al-Farghani and completed in the year 247 of the Hijra. It is the oldest structure in Egypt to survive from the Islamic conquest in its original form, and it is a fiscal instrument. The height the flood reached determined the assessment for the year. It has been read annually, in the same well, for eleven centuries, which is why the run of Nile maxima and minima assembled from the Arabic records begins in 622 and is one of the longest continuous instrumental series in the world.

Stand back from all of it. In 969 the Egypt that a Fatimid soldier would enter was a country whose agriculture had depended on the flood since before writing; whose surplus depended on canals and dykes that had to be cleared every year by coordinated labour; whose fiscal machinery had been running on the same principle under Pharaoh, Ptolemy, Rome, Byzantium and the caliphate; whose Christian population had been governed through its own hierarchy for three hundred and twenty-eight years by a Muslim state which had never asked it to believe anything; whose Muslim population was Sunni and mostly of the Shafi'i and Maliki schools; and whose Arabic-speaking administrative class had been keeping the registers in Arabic for a quarter of a millennium.

How large those populations were is not knowable. Estimates for Egypt's total population in this period, all of them extrapolations from tax figures or from later data, run from under three million to something above five, and no figure among them rests on anything a demographer would accept. The confessional proportions are worse: the date at which Muslims became a majority in Egypt has been argued anywhere from the

late ninth century to the fourteenth, the earlier datings rest on evidence that has since been shown to have been misread, and the trend of the scholarship over a century has been steadily later. What can be said without a figure is that in 969 the Christian population of Egypt was very large, quite possibly still the majority, and had been under Muslim rule for three centuries without ceasing to be Christian; and that the Muslim population, whatever its size, was Sunni essentially without exception.

Not one person in the country was an Ismaili.

What each of them could see

Before anyone's motives are guessed at, it is worth reconstructing what the men who decided anything in 968 and 969 had in front of them, because in almost every case the decision follows from the field and needs no character to explain it.

Al-Mu'izz, at al-Mansuriya. He held Ifriqiya, Sicily, and — for the moment — a corridor to the Atlantic. He had a claim to universal headship of the community of Islam and a treasury filled substantially by a caravan trade that terminated in a city fifteen hundred miles away and had already changed hands twice in his lifetime. He had also inherited three failed invasions of Egypt, and knew precisely why they had failed: each had taken Alexandria without difficulty and then met an Abbasid relief force from Syria at Fustat. By 968 the second half of that sequence had disappeared. The Abbasid caliphate no longer commanded an army; the Buyids in Baghdad were Shi'a of a rival branch and were fighting each other; the Byzantines had taken Crete, Cilicia and Antioch and were pressing south, which meant that any Muslim ruler who took Egypt could present himself as the man who would answer them; and Egypt itself had lost its strongman. He had begun stockpiling in 965 or 966. What he could see was a door that had been shut three times standing open, with a queue forming behind it.

Jawhar, commanding. He was by origin a slave, brought to Ifriqiya from Sicily, of Greek or Slav extraction depending on which epithet in the sources one credits; he had been secretary to one caliph and commander-in-chief to another, and had just conquered Morocco. Everything he possessed came from the office of a man who could take it back, and he had no kin, no tribe and no land in any country he had ever fought in. His position pointed at exactly one strategy in Egypt, and it is the one he used: negotiate rather than storm, guarantee everything the notables asked for, and take the country intact, because a wrecked Egypt was worth nothing to the master whose favour was his entire estate.

The notables of Fustat. Their ruler was dead, his heir was a boy, the vizier was arresting his rivals in the bureau, the two army factions had turned on each other and one had been expelled from the country, the tax revenue had stopped flowing, the price

of grain had gone through the roof and there was famine in the villages. Their field contained no option in which they resisted successfully. It contained two options: a Fatimid army that had sent agents ahead for years and was known to be offering terms, or continued disorder. They sent a delegation, headed by a descendant of the Prophet resident in the city, to get the terms in writing.

The Coptic patriarch and his bishops. Their apparatus had survived Chalcedon, Heraclius, Amr, the Umayyad governors, the branding, the poll-tax on the unburied, and the burning of the Delta. It had done so by never having a stake in which Muslim held Fustat. There is no evidence they were consulted and no reason they should have been; from where they stood, the question was which party would confirm the arrangement, and the answer had been the same for three hundred years.

The cultivator on the Nile. He had no field in this at all. His year was set by the flood, his assessment by a column on Rawda island, his obligations by whoever held the register, and his labour by the canal that had to be cleared before the water came. Between February and July 969 the name at the top of the register changed. Nothing else in the list did.

The arithmetic on the eve

Set out plainly, with the figures given as what they are.

The dynasty that moved on Egypt in 969 was sixty years old, measured from the proclamation at Sijilmasa. Its founding doctrine had split its own movement ten years before it acquired a state, and the seceders had built a rival power on the Persian Gulf which would invade Egypt twice within five years of the conquest. Its army was Kutama Berber, recruited by a missionary out of a mountain confederation, plus slave-soldiers and, increasingly, whatever could be bought. Its own capital province had risen against it within living memory in a war that lasted three years and reached the walls of the caliph's fortress. Its confession, after sixty years of rule, was held by its army, its missionaries and its court, and by a negligible fraction of the population of Ifriqiya — a fact recorded not by its enemies but in the surrender terms of one of its own towns.

The country it moved against had been under Muslim rule for three hundred and twenty-eight years. Its Christian majority or near-majority was administered through a hierarchy the first conqueror had deliberately left standing and had personally reinstated. Its Muslim population was Sunni. Its administration ran in Arabic and had done so for two and a half centuries. Its revenue was the richest in the Mediterranean world, and it sat astride the transit trade between the Indian Ocean and Europe. Its subsistence depended annually on a flood measured in a well built by an Abbasid

caliph, and on canal maintenance that had to be coordinated by somebody every single year.

The conquest itself cost almost nothing. Jawhar left Raqqada on the sixth of February 969, entered the Delta about two months later, took Alexandria without a fight, and issued a written safe-conduct to the Egyptians promising their rights and the war against the Byzantines. The last Ikhshidid troops tried to hold the Nile crossing between the twenty-ninth of June and the third of July and failed. Fustat submitted; Jawhar renewed the safe-conduct and took possession on the sixth of July; the Friday sermon was read in al-Mu'izz's name on the ninth. On the same day he took the city he began marking out a walled palace enclosure to the north-east of it, which would be called al-Qahira.

Two figures from this operation circulate and neither can be checked. Al-Maqrizi, writing in the fifteenth century, reports that the expedition cost something like twenty-four million dinars to prepare; the army is variously reported at a hundred thousand men. Both are traditional numbers of the kind a compiler four centuries downstream reaches for to mean *very large*, and neither is used here for anything.

One figure worth more, because it explains what the money was for, is the caravan revenue. The province of Sijilmasa is reported to have yielded the Fatimid treasury at Qayrawan on the order of four hundred thousand dinars a year in the 920s and early 930s, said to be roughly half of what the whole Maghrib brought in; the report reaches us at second hand through the geographical tradition and cannot be verified. What can be verified is metallurgical: the tenth-century contest between Córdoba and the Fatimids for the western Maghrib tracks the control of that caravan terminus, and the periods in which each power struck gold correspond to the periods in which each held it. Jawhar's expedition to the Atlantic in 958 put Fatimid dies in the Sijilmasa mint. Eleven years later he was crossing the Nile.

An order that had spent half a century fighting for a desert town fifteen hundred miles from its capital took, in five months and with negligible fighting, the richest agricultural revenue on earth.

Reading the landscape against the framework

Three things, and the first is this study's opening contribution.

One: a grievance that acquires a fixed date in the year stops being a grievance and becomes an inheritance, and the calendar is the diagnostic. The collection's account of how an order installs its world-picture concerns the rite performed on the infant, the week and the year divided by observances, the building the child is taken to, the language he learns to read in — an apparatus that reaches a person before he can

assess anything and installs the frame through which he assesses everything afterwards. That account has so far been examined as something rulers do. Karbala shows the same machinery running for a *defeated* party, and running better than it runs for most winners.

The mechanism is exact. A political grievance held by adults decays on a predictable schedule, because the men who held it die and their sons weigh it against their own interests and find it costly. A grievance with a date in the calendar does not decay, because it is no longer being weighed by adults at all: it is being transmitted to children through fasts, mourning, visitation, recitation and naming, in the same channel and by the same means as the rest of their world-picture, and by the time they are old enough to price it they hold it as they hold the shape of the year. Two hundred and eighty-three years after Karbala a soldier who wanted a public liturgy for it in Baghdad found one already built and waiting for permission, and thirteen centuries later it is performed annually across a quarter of the world.

State it as a rule to be tested elsewhere: **to find out whether a defeated claim will still be live in a century, do not measure how many people currently hold it — ask whether it has acquired a date.** A grievance without a fixed observance is being carried by the aggrieved and will die with them; a grievance with one is being carried by children who did not suffer the injury, and will outlive every political circumstance that produced it. The corollary is a warning to conquerors, and it will matter twice more in this study: destroying the party that holds a grievance does nothing to the calendar, and the calendar is where the grievance actually lives.

Two: a conqueror never meets a baseline, only a former conquest at some stage of naturalisation — and the two halves of this study's world were at opposite stages, which is a fact about the conquered and not about the conquerors. The Arab armies of the seventh century took Egypt and the Maghrib within thirty years of each other, in the same campaign, under the same authority, with the same doctrine and much the same terms. Three centuries later Egypt was a country in which the settlement had become the world — no rising since 831, the registers in Arabic, the Christian hierarchy an established part of the fiscal machinery — and the Maghrib was a country in which it had not, still throwing up Kharijite imamates and Berber risings and, in 944, a rebellion that reached the walls of the ruling caliph's fortress.

What differed was not the conquerors' policy. It was what each conquered order presented them with. Egypt handed the newcomers a single head, sitting on a hierarchy that already reached every village, whose incumbent had spent the previous decade being persecuted by the government the Arabs had just destroyed — a seat a stranger could occupy without believing anything, and an occupant with every reason to accept

the offer. The Berber west presented no such seat: authority ran through tribes and confederations, there was no chair to sit in, and a conqueror who could not capture an apparatus had to build his own and pay for it in force, every year, forever. The difference between a province that stops rebelling after 831 and a province still producing armed prophets in 944 is not a difference of temperament. It is the difference between an order with a capturable head and an order without one.

That observation is not new to the collection, but this case sharpens it in a way worth carrying forward: **the two outcomes were produced by the same conquest, in the same generation, and can therefore be compared without any of the usual confounds of century, doctrine or technology.** The Fatimids inherited both results at once — an eastern province where a previous conquest had been naturalised for them, and a western one where it never had — and the study will have to watch them govern the two differently.

Three, and it is the frame for everything that follows: this order's founding claim was that the furniture of the world was stolen. Most conquerors assert that their rule is rightful. This one asserted that a specific succession, at a specific place, in a specific year, had been usurped, and that everything built on it since — three dynasties, an entire legal establishment, the settled practice of the great majority of Muslims — was error resting on theft. That is a claim of a different logical type, and it makes an unusually sharp demand: it can be made only by someone who is himself the rightful heir, in person, alive, and identifiable. The dynasty's own history begins with the year that demand was met by an assertion rather than by a return, and with the men who would not accept the substitution walking out.

Everything expensive about the Fatimid state follows from that. An order whose warrant is a genealogy must defend a genealogy. An order whose warrant is a living Imam must produce one. And an order which asserts that the arrangement everyone else takes for reality is in fact a two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old crime has told its subjects, in advance, that it cannot simply be the way things are.

A note on sources. The Ghadir Khumm tradition is quoted in the form common to the Sunni and Shi'i collections, من كنت مولاه فعليّ مولاه; it is transmitted in many variants across many chains, no single manuscript is relied on here, and the translation and the note on the ambiguity of *mawlā* are mine. The Abbasid revolutionary formula الرضا من آل محمد and the epithet صاحب الحمار are given in their standard forms as reported in the historical literature. The passages from the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* — the appointment of Cyrus as prefect and patriarch together; the terms on which cities were to be treated; Amr's letter of protection for Benjamin; Amr's instruction to Benjamin to resume the government of his churches

and his people; the exactions of Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Malik — are quoted exactly from B. T. A. Evetts's English translation in the *Patrologia Orientalis* (1904–1915), which is public domain. The Arabic is printed facing that translation in the same volumes, but the digitised text available for this work does not render the Arabic script reliably, so only the English is quoted here and that limitation is stated rather than concealed.

The *History of the Patriarchs* embarrasses the use made of it in one respect that must be named. It is a Coptic ecclesiastical compilation, assembled by Severus of al-Ashmunain and his collaborators in the late tenth and eleventh centuries — that is, under Fatimid rule — from Coptic and Greek materials of varying age, and its account of Amr's personal reverence for Benjamin is told by the party with the strongest possible interest in establishing that its own hierarchy had been restored lawfully and honourably. Its portrait of Amr is not evidence of what Amr felt. It is used here only for the shape of the instrument, which is the same whoever describes it, and for the fiscal detail, which runs against the compilers' interest in presenting the arrangement as tolerable.

Dates and events in the Shi'i pre-history — the Saqifa, the first civil war, Siffin and the Kharijite secession, Ali's murder in 661, Mu'awiya's designation of Yazid, Karbala on 10 Muharram 61 (10 October 680), the death of Ja'far al-Sadiq in 148/765 and the division of the succession between Isma'il's line and Musa al-Kazim's, the Abbasid revolution of 750 and the Hasanid revolt of 762–3 — follow the standard reference accounts, which are consistent on the sequence and vary on detail. The traditional figure of about seventy armed men with Husayn at Karbala is a traditional number and is given as such. The conversion of 18 Dhu'l-Hijja 10 AH to a Julian date is given in the literature as either 10 or 16 March 632; the discrepancy is not resolved here.

The Baghdad Ashura of 10 Muharram 352 (8 February 963) and the public celebration of Ghadir permitted from the previous year are reported by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) and Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233), both Sunni compilers writing two to three centuries after the event and unsympathetic to it; the description of the mourning is theirs and is reported here as theirs. The claim in the text that this is the earliest *recorded* public procession is a claim about the record and not about practice; earlier private mourning and grave-visitation are attested, and the argument here does not depend on the 963 date being the first occurrence, only on the liturgy being fully formed by then.

The Isma'ili underground of the ninth century, the base at Salamiyya, the doctrinal change of 899 and the resulting schism with Hamdan Qarmat and Abdan, and the murder of Abdan, are drawn from the modern scholarship, principally Farhad Daftary and Heinz Halm, paraphrased and credited; the reconstruction rests substantially on

later Ismaili and later hostile sources and should be held loosely. The dynasty's descent from Ali is contested and is not adjudicated here, in either direction; the study treats the claim and its denial as acts.

The Ifriqiyan sequence — Abu Abdallah's meeting with Kutama pilgrims at Mecca in 893/4, the base at Ikjan from about 902, Mila 902, Sétif 904, the campaigns of 907–8, the fall of Raqqada on 25 March 909, the taking of Sijilmasa on 26 August 909 and the proclamation of al-Mahdi, the entry into Raqqada in January 910, and the execution of Abu Abdallah in February 911 — follows the standard accounts. The precise day of the execution is given as 18 February in most modern accounts and as 28 February in some; it is given here only as February 911. The account of Abu Yazid's revolt of 944–947, including the exclusion of Fatimid officials and Ismailis from the safe-conduct granted to al-Aribus on 7 August 944, follows the modern scholarship on the revolt; that detail is load-bearing in the text and rests on a single reported document.

The Egyptian sequence — Kafur's death in April 968, the collapse of the Ikhshidid government, the departure of Jawhar's expedition from Raqqada on 6 February 969, the taking of Alexandria, the *amān*, the crossing of the Nile between 29 June and 3 July, the submission of Fustat on 6 July and the khutba in al-Mu'izz's name on 9 July, and the marking out of al-Qahira — follows the standard reference accounts. The *amān* itself is preserved through al-Maqrizi and is examined in the module on the settlement rather than here. The reported preparation cost of twenty-four million dinars and the reported army of a hundred thousand are al-Maqrizi's and the tradition's respectively, are stated in the text as uncheckable, and carry no argument.

Contested figures are given as ranges and their contestedness is on the page rather than here. Egypt's population in the tenth century is given as somewhere between under three million and above five, and the honest position is that no figure is reliable; the estimates in the literature range far more widely than that and rest on extrapolation. The date at which Muslims became a majority in Egypt is given as argued between the late ninth and the fourteenth centuries; the trend of the scholarship across the last century has been to push it later, and the earlier datings have been criticised as resting on misread evidence, which is stated in the text. The reported Sijilmasa revenue of about four hundred thousand dinars a year to the Fatimid treasury in the 920s and early 930s, said to be half the Maghrib's total, reaches this study at second hand and is flagged as unverifiable where it is used. The correlation between Umayyad and Fatimid gold minting and control of Sijilmasa is drawn from the numismatic literature on the trans-Saharan gold trade and from the companion study of al-Andalus, which

established the Cordoban side of the same contest from the coins; recent isotopic work on the sourcing of Sijilmasa gold is consistent with it.

The Nilometer on Rawda island — rebuilt in 247/861 by order of al-Mutawakkil to a design associated with the astronomer al-Farghani, a marble column graduated in nineteen cubits in a stone-lined well, its walls carrying Kufic Qur'anic inscriptions on water and vegetation — and its function in setting the annual tax assessment, follow the standard architectural and reference accounts. There was an earlier structure on the site, conventionally dated to about 715, and a restoration under al-Ma'mun; the extant building is the 861 one. The Nile flood series compiled from the Arabic records, running from 622, is Omar Toussoun's (1925) and is used in this study for its shape and its dates; its individual readings carry known problems of datum and of transmission which are set out where the series does analytic work.

MODULE 1

The Victorious Troops and the Triumphant Armies

The floor of force — a country fought for over seven years by a missionary's tribesmen, a country bought in five months with a document, a capital built on a rock with one gate, and the prize that was never taken.

What the army was made of

Every order examined in this collection begins with somebody's organised violence, and the first question to ask of a founding is always the plainest one: whose men, and why were they available to this particular claimant rather than to somebody else.

The men were Kutama Berbers of the Lesser Kabylie, and the answer to why they were available is fiscal.

The Kutama appear in the ninth-century Arabic geographical literature as one Berber people among many and not an important one; Ibn Khurradadhbih, writing in the 880s, lists the name without remark. They lived in mountains behind the coast between what is now Sétif and Constantine, in numbers large enough to matter and terrain broken enough to make reaching them expensive. The Aghlabid emirs at Qayrawan, who had ruled Ifriqiya as a hereditary governorship since 800, did not effectively reach them. There was no garrison in the Kutama highlands, no assessment worth collecting, and no reason to spend an army acquiring one. The arrangement suited both parties: the Kutama ignored the government, sheltered men the government wanted, and were not taxed.

That is a very ordinary state of affairs and it has a consequence that is not ordinary at all. A population outside the fiscal machine is a population with no stake in the machine, no officials of its own inside it, no career open through it and nothing to lose by its destruction. It is also, by the same fact, a population the machine has no continuous means of watching. Everything that made the Kutama cheap to ignore made them cheap to recruit, and the two were not separate facts about them but one fact seen from two sides.

Nor were they already spoken for. Most of the Berbers of the central and western Maghrib had, since the great revolt of 740, been Kharijite of one variety or another; the Ibadi imamate at Tahert lay to the Kutama's west, and its doctrine — that headship of

the community belongs to the most fit of any descent — had been the standard idiom of Berber resistance to Arab pedigree for a century and a half. The Kutama were not Ibadi. They were the one substantial armed body in the region whose loyalty was not already committed to a rival account of who ought to rule.

A summoner named Abu Abdallah al-Husayn, a Kufan of the Ismaili mission, established both of these facts in conversation at Mecca in 893 or 894, where a party of Kutama had come on pilgrimage and where he presented himself as a Yemeni. The later Ismaili tradition tells it as a chance meeting; the modern scholarship is sceptical, on the reasonable ground that the mission chose its targets and that earlier missionaries had been sent west before him. Either way, what he learned in that conversation was exactly the two things a man in his position needed: that the government could not reach these people, and that these people could put armed men in the field. They invited him home. He went, and stayed fifteen years.

What he did there is not recoverable in the detail one would want, because the fullest account of it is the *Iftitah al-da'wa* of al-Qadi al-Nu'man, the dynasty's own chief jurist, written from inside the successful regime two generations later. That is a partisan document, but it is a partisan document of an unusual kind — an insider writing while the state ran, rather than an enemy writing after it fell — and it is the reason certain small numbers in the campaign narrative are oddly precise where the large ones are round. What can be said is that between about 902 and 909 a tribal confederation became an army: it acquired a base at Ikjan, a command, a discipline, a reason to obey a foreigner, and the habit of winning.

The doctrine was doing work here that should be named plainly rather than admired. A confederation of tribes has no reason to accept a single commander, because each chief's authority derives from his own people and is diminished by submission to another chief. A doctrine that locates all legitimate authority in an absent Imam, and makes the summoner his representative, solves that problem at a stroke: no chief submits to another chief, and all submit to a man who is not a chief at all and can never become one. Abu Abdallah's fifteen years among the Kutama were not primarily an exercise in persuasion. They were the construction of a command structure out of materials that did not otherwise contain one.

Seven years, and one afternoon

The conquest of Ifriqiya was fought, and it took seven years, and it is worth following because the contrast with what the same dynasty did to Egypt sixty years later is the whole of this module's argument.

The pattern from 902 was attrition against fortified places along the old Roman roads. Mila fell in 902 and was retaken; Sétif in 904; Belezma in 905. In 907 an Aghlabid column pushed deep into the Kutama mountains, destroyed the stronghold of Dar Malul, met a body of Kutama cavalry, panicked, and fell back on the fortress of Baghaya to sit still. In 907 and 908 Abu Abdallah came down onto the plains and took Tobna, Baghaya, Maydara and Constantine; in the winter of 908–909 he took the oasis towns around the Chott el-Djerid — Tozeur, Nafta, Gafsa — and had the south.

Ziyadat Allah III, the eleventh and last Aghlabid emir, spent those years doing what a ruler in his position could do. He moved from Tunis to the palace suburb of Raqqada outside Qayrawan and put a wall round it of rammed earth and unbaked brick. He mustered an army at al-Aribus, the ancient Laribus, on the northern Roman road, on the correct assumption that the attack on Qayrawan would come that way. And he did not command it himself; he left it to an Aghlabid prince, Ibrahim ibn Abi al-Aghlab, and went back to Tunis.

That last decision repays a moment, because it is the kind of thing a man does when his field of vision contains a threat he does not fully credit. Ziyadat Allah had come to power in 903 by the murder of his father and had spent his reign managing an army that had been mutinying against his house for a century. From where he stood, a Berber rising in the mountains was one item on a list that also contained his own troops, his own family and a Byzantine frontier in Sicily. He fortified his palace and delegated his field army, which is what a ruler does about a nuisance. It was not a nuisance.

The battle came on Saturday the eighteenth of March 909, at al-Aribus. It lasted most of the day and was decided late in the afternoon, around the time of the *asr* prayer, when a body of five hundred and seventy-five Kutama who had worked their way round the field along a deep streambed came in on the Aghlabid flank. The army broke. Ibrahim ibn Abi al-Aghlab got away towards Qayrawan with what was left of it.

The oddly exact five hundred and seventy-five sits beside the round figures the same tradition gives for the army as a whole — two hundred thousand in one report, upwards of a hundred thousand in others — and the contrast is instructive about what these sources are. A round hundred thousand is a compiler's word for *very many*. A count of five hundred and seventy-five is a number somebody wrote down, probably because the men in that unit were afterwards known, and it is worth more than the other figure by a wide margin even though it describes a fraction of the force. No estimate of the Kutama army's size is used here for anything.

On the following day, Sunday the nineteenth of March, al-Aribus offered an unconditional surrender. The Kutama massacred its inhabitants and looted the city.

Hold that town in mind. It will come back.

Ziyadat Allah did not fight again. He emptied what he could of the treasury and left for the east on the twenty-fifth of March 909, and died in exile some years later at Jerusalem or on the road to it. Abu Abdallah entered Raqqada the same day, proclaimed an amnesty to the people of Qayrawan, and distributed the spoils to his soldiers.

Read those two acts together, because they are the founding settlement of Ifriqiya in miniature and they point in opposite directions. The amnesty was addressed to the townspeople of a Sunni city that had just lost its government; it cost nothing and bought quiet. The spoils were addressed to the Kutama, and they cost the townspeople. The men who had done the fighting were paid out of the country they had taken, which is the ordinary arrangement of a conquest made by tribesmen, and it fixed from the first week the relation between the army and the population it garrisoned. The revolts of the following decades — and there were many — were very largely about the exactions of the Kutama.

Only after the victory was secure did Abu Abdallah name the man he had been working for. He then took a column west and, on the twenty-sixth of August 909, reached Sijilmasa, where Sa'id ibn al-Husayn had been living as a merchant and had lately been put under house arrest. He was brought out, proclaimed as Imam and caliph with the style *al-Mahdī bi'llāh*, and entered Raqqada in January 910. On the way, the Kutama column extinguished the Ibadi imamate at Tahert, which had stood for a hundred and thirty-three years.

The man who made it

Fourteen months after the proclamation, in February 911, al-Mahdi had Abu Abdallah killed, along with his brother. The killing was done by a Kutama commander.

The two traditions give two motives and neither can be tested. The Ismaili account holds that the summoner and his brother conspired against the Imam and were justly destroyed; the hostile account holds that the summoner had come to understand that the man he had spent fifteen years announcing was not what had been announced. Both are stories about interior states, and the interior states of the dead are not available.

The position is available, and it accounts for the act without needing either story.

Consider what each man held in the spring of 910. Abu Abdallah had made the Kutama into an army, commanded them for fifteen years, taken a country with them, and was the only human being in Ifriqiya they had ever obeyed. Al-Mahdi had arrived from house arrest in a desert town with a genealogy, a household and no troops. Between them there was one indispensable position and two candidates for it, and the

arrangement in which the doctrine belongs to one man and the army obeys another is not an arrangement that survives contact with any serious decision. Whichever of them moved first, the structure had only one stable outcome, and the doctrine had the advantage, because a doctrine can be transferred to a new commander and a commander cannot be transferred to a new doctrine.

The bill arrived promptly. Kutama commanders rose in the summoner's name; there were risings in the Kutama country itself, and among the Zenata and the Sanhaja, and among Arab groups who had done well out of the Aghlabids; the Berbers of the Nafusa and the towns of Tripolitania went their own way and had to be brought back. The order spent the whole of al-Mahdi's twenty-four-year reign holding down the province it had taken in seven years.

A city with one gate

Which brings this module to the physical fact that says most about what the new order believed its danger to be, and says it in stone that is still standing.

In 912 al-Mahdi began looking for a site for a new capital, and chose one: a narrow rocky peninsula on the Sahel coast, running out into the Mediterranean, joined to the mainland by a neck a few hundred metres wide. Construction began in 916. He cut a ditch across the neck and built a wall behind it with a single land entrance — the Skifa Kahla, the Dark Gate, whose vaulted passage runs some fifty metres and was closed by a portcullis. The congregational mosque, begun in 916, has no minaret and one monumental doorway and reads, from outside, as a keep. The city was inaugurated on the twentieth of February 921 and named al-Mahdiyya, after himself.

Now ask the question the framework always asks of an expenditure: what is it defending against, and how would you know?

It is not defending against the Byzantines, who were a naval problem and against whom a peninsula with a harbour is an asset rather than a shelter. It is not defending against the Abbasids, who by 916 could not have reached Ifriqiya with an army if they had wanted to and did not want to. The ditch, the wall and the single gate face landward, toward Qayrawan and toward the interior. The caliph moved his residence out of the Sunni city he had just conquered and put a rock and a portcullis between himself and the country. Five years earlier he had killed the man who commanded his army, and had spent the interval suppressing that army's revolts.

The design of a capital is an unusually honest document, because it is expensive, permanent, and settled long before the danger it anticipates arrives. Mahdia is the statement, made in 916 by the men who knew most about it, that the Fatimid order expected to be attacked from inside the territory it ruled.

It was right, and the vindication is dated. In 944 an Ibadi Berber preacher, Abu Yazid Makhlad ibn Kaydad, came out of the Aurès with a coalition of Zenata and disaffected tribes and took most of Ifriqiya, including Qayrawan. He destroyed a Kutama army. He besieged Mahdia for the better part of a year, and the second Fatimid caliph died inside it in 946 with the revolt still running; the third took until August 947 to hunt the man down in a mountain fortress and take him. The peninsula and the gate held. The country had not.

And here is where the town of al-Aribus comes back.

On the seventh of August 944, al-Aribus surrendered to Abu Yazid's rebels and received, in exchange, a written safe-conduct for its inhabitants. The safe-conduct explicitly excluded Fatimid officials and all adherents of Ismailism from its protection.

Set the two documents side by side. In March 909 the Kutama took al-Aribus by storm, massacred it and looted it. In August 944 al-Aribus, negotiating its surrender to the enemies of the men who had done that, named the ruler's confession as the category it was not obliged to spare. Thirty-five years is one generation and a half. The men who wrote the second document were, some of them, the children of the men who had died in the first.

That is what a floor looks like when the belief laid over it has not taken. The order could hold a fortress; it could not put its own name into a surrender document in its own province as anything but an exception to mercy.

The door that kept shutting

The Fatimids wanted Egypt from almost the first moment they had an army, and they failed to take it three times before they took it. The failures are more informative than the success, because they identify precisely which condition changed.

The first attempt came in 914–915, five years after the proclamation, under the heir-apparent al-Qa'im with a Berber commander, Habasa ibn Yusuf. It took the Cyrenaican coast and it took Alexandria without much trouble, and then it broke against Fustat and against Abbasid reinforcements coming west under the general Mu'nis, and went home in May 915. The second came in 919–921, again under al-Qa'im. It again took Alexandria easily; it found the garrison at Fustat weak and unpaid, and did not attack; the Fatimid fleet was destroyed by the Abbasid fleet in March 920; Mu'nis arrived again; and after two years of holding the Fayyum and much of Upper Egypt the expedition withdrew. A third attempt in the mid-930s did no better.

The shape of all three is identical and it is the shape of the country. Alexandria is a coastal city reachable along the shore from Cyrenaica, and it fell every time. Fustat is four hundred kilometres up the Nile from the sea, and taking it requires either a battle

in the Delta against a defender with interior lines, or a defender who does not fight. In 915, in 921 and in the 930s there was a defender who fought, because the Abbasid caliphate could still put a relief army into Egypt from Syria and Iraq.

By 968 it could not. The caliphate in Baghdad had been in the custody of the Buyids for twenty-three years and commanded no field army of its own; the Buyids were fighting each other; the Hamdanids of Aleppo had been broken by the Byzantines, who had taken Cilicia and Antioch and were pressing south. In Egypt the strongman Kafur died in April 968 without an heir; the vizier began arresting his rivals in the bureau; the two army factions turned on each other and one expelled the other from the country; the tax revenue stopped moving; and there was famine.

Al-Mu'izz had been stockpiling since 965 or 966. What his position now showed him was the door that had shut three times standing open, with a queue forming behind it — because a Byzantine advance into Syria meant that whoever took Egypt could present himself as the man who would answer it, and because a country with no government and no grain was a country whose notables were looking for somebody.

Five months, and a document

The expedition left Raqqada on the sixth of February 969. It was commanded by Jawhar, called al-Siqilli, the Sicilian: by origin a slave, brought to Ifriqiya and presented to the third Fatimid caliph, made secretary to the fourth, appointed commander-in-chief in 962, and fresh from the campaign of 958–960 that had taken Fez and Sijilmasa and reached the Atlantic.

It reached the Delta about two months later. Alexandria was taken without a fight. Jawhar established a camp at Tarruja on the western edge of the Delta and secured the west bank of the Nile from the sea down to the Fayyum, and there he stopped and waited, which is the single most important tactical decision of the campaign and the one that separates it from 915 and 921.

What he was waiting for came out to him. A delegation of five men rode to Tarruja from Fustat: the sharif Abu Ja'far Muslim, a descendant of the Prophet resident in the city, at its head, with Abu Isma'il al-Rassi, Abu'l-Tayyib al-Hashimi, Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Nasr and the qadi. They had come to ask for terms in writing.

They got them. The document Jawhar issued is the founding instrument of Fatimid Egypt, it is preserved in full — by al-Maqrizi in the fifteenth century and, independently, by the Tayyibi Ismaili compiler Idris Imad al-Din in the same period, which is as close to two-source confirmation as this subject usually permits — and it opens like this:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

هذا كتاب من جوهر الكاتب عبد أمير المؤمنين المعز لدين الله صلوات الله عليه، لجماعة أهل مصر الساكنين بها من أهلها ومن غيرهم: إنه قد ورد مَن سألتموه الترسل والاجتماع معي، وهم أبو جعفر مسلم الشريف أطال الله بقاه، وأبو إسماعيل الرشي أيده الله، وأبو الطيب الهاشمي أيده الله، وأبو جعفر أحمد بن نصر أعزه الله، والقاضي أعزه الله؛ وذكروا عنكم أنكم التمستم كتاباً يشتمل على أمانكم في أنفسكم وأموالكم وبلادكم وجميع أحوالكم

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is a document from Jawhar the secretary, slave of the Commander of the Faithful al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah — God's blessings be upon him — to the whole body of the people of Egypt dwelling therein, both of its own people and of others. There have come those whom you asked to carry your message and to meet with me — namely Abu Ja'far Muslim the sharif, may God prolong his life; and Abu Isma'il al-Rassi, may God support him; and Abu'l-Tayyib al-Hashimi, may God support him; and Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Nasr, may God strengthen him; and the qadi, may God strengthen him — and they reported of you that you had sought a document comprising your safety in your persons, your property, your lands and all your circumstances."

Four things are on the face of that opening and each of them is doing work.

The document is issued at the request of the conquered, and says so. It is not a proclamation of terms imposed; it is a written answer to a written demand, and its first substantive clause is a recital of who asked. That is the language of a negotiation, and it is accurate: nobody in Egypt had beaten Jawhar and nobody had to.

The delegates are named, with blessings, individually. Naming them puts them on the record as the men who arranged the transfer, which is a favour and a hold at the same time, and it identifies for the reader exactly who the country's switchable apex consisted of — a sharif, two men of Alid and Hashimite descent, a notable, and the chief judge. Not one soldier.

The guarantee is comprehensive in a specific way: persons, property, lands, and *all your circumstances*. The Arabic phrase, جميع أحوالكم, is deliberately wide, and what a population asks to have guaranteed tells you what it was afraid of losing.

And Jawhar signs himself عبد أمير المؤمنين — *slave of the Commander of the Faithful*. He was one, in the ordinary and literal sense: a man bought as a boy. The founding instrument of the richest state in the Mediterranean world is issued by a slave, in his own hand, and describes him as one in its first line.

The document continues at length with the promises. Al-Mu'izz's purpose in sending the armies is stated, and the statement is the founding legend of the conquest in its earliest surviving form:

وهو أنه صلوات الله عليه لم يكن إخراجه للعساكر المنصورة والجيوش المظفرة إلا لما فيه إعزازكم وحمايتكم والجهاد عنكم

"and it is that he — God's blessings be upon him — did not send forth the victorious troops and the triumphant armies save for what is in it of your exaltation, and your protection, and the waging of war on your behalf."

The remaining clauses are given here in summary rather than quotation, because the full text was not obtained in the original for this study and rests on the modern editions. On the accounts of both compilers the document undertook: that the Egyptians would be left on their existing legal schools and their customary practice; that the Friday prayer and the fast and the call to prayer would continue as they were; that mosques would be maintained and those who served them paid; that the pilgrimage roads would be secured and the war against the Byzantines prosecuted; that justice would be done and unlawful exactions removed; and that the protected communities of Christians and Jews would be treated according to the established arrangements.

Read that list against what it is a list *of*. Every item on it is a promise to change nothing. The conquest of Egypt was sold to the Egyptians as the continuation of Egypt with a different name at the top, by a dynasty whose entire claim to exist was that the last two and a half centuries had been a usurpation.

The rest was quick. Between the twenty-ninth of June and the third of July the remaining Ikhshidid troops tried to hold the Nile crossing near Giza and were beaten. In the confusion, pro-Fatimid parties inside Fustat took control and declared for al-Mu'izz. Jawhar renewed the safe-conduct and entered the city on the sixth of July 969. On Friday the ninth the sermon was read in al-Mu'izz's name, which is the act that transfers sovereignty in this world, and it was read in the mosques of a city that had heard the Abbasid's name in that place every Friday for two hundred and nineteen years.

On the day he took Fustat, Jawhar went north of it and began marking out a walled enclosure for his master's household and his own troops. It was called al-Qahira.

What the conquest did not do

The floor that took Egypt in five months could not take the thing Egypt was supposed to be a step towards, and the failure was immediate.

Fatimid columns went north into Palestine and Syria at once. Damascus was taken in 970. In August 971 the Fatimid commander Ja'far ibn Fallah was defeated and killed outside it by the Qarmatians of Bahrayn — the movement that had broken from

Salamiyya in 899 over the very claim al-Mu'izz's house rested on, now in league with the Abbasid caliph and with Bedouin allies. The Qarmatians came south and reached the outskirts of Cairo in the winter of 971, where Jawhar beat them off at Ayn Shams with the population of the capital called out to fight. They came again in 974 and were beaten again, this time by al-Mu'izz's son at the head of the army, who rode into Cairo under the caliphal parasol with prisoners on camels and several thousand heads on lances. Damascus was not securely held until the reign of al-Mu'izz's successor, and Syria was contested for the whole of the dynasty's life.

And Baghdad was never taken. It came into Fatimid hands once, by accident, and the way that episode ended is the sharpest single fact about the limits of this floor.

In 1058 a Turkish slave-soldier, Arslan al-Basasiri, formerly a commander of the Buyids and now out of employment and in correspondence with Cairo, took Baghdad while the Seljuk sultan Tughril was away suppressing his brother's revolt. The Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im was removed from the city and held in custody up the Euphrates. The Friday sermon in the congregational mosque of Baghdad was read in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir. The Abbasid throne, robes, pulpit and staff were packed up and sent to Cairo.

The claim of 909 had been that the caliphate in Baghdad was a usurpation and that the rightful line would take it back. In 1058 the rightful line had the city, the caliph in a cage, the regalia in its treasury, and its name in the sermon.

It did nothing. No Fatimid army marched east. Tughril came back the following year; al-Basasiri, who had never had more than local Arab allies and a Fatimid subsidy, evacuated the city without a battle and was killed shortly after; the Abbasid caliph was restored in December 1059 and the sermon went back to his name. The whole episode lasted about a year.

That is not a moral failure and it should not be read as one. It is an arithmetical fact about a floor. The Fatimid army was raised in the Maghrib and paid out of Egypt, and it could reach Syria with difficulty and Iraq not at all; the men who could have gone were needed where they were, against the Qarmatians, against Byzantium, against the Berbers behind them and, increasingly, against each other. The claim was universal and the reach was regional, and the gap between them is a permanent feature of this order rather than an episode in it.

Why nobody could leave

One more thing belongs in an account of a floor, and it is the thing that makes Egypt the country it is.

An order's force prices defection, but pricing defection only works on people who cannot simply go somewhere else. Egypt is among the most completely enclosed inhabited places on earth. The cultivated land is a ribbon along a river with desert on both sides of it; the Delta fans out at the top and stops at the sea. A cultivator who leaves his village does not reach a frontier, a forest or a hill country. He reaches sand. The alternative to the arrangement is not a harder life somewhere else; there is no somewhere else within reach of a man on foot with a family.

And the arrangement was not merely a government. It was the metabolism. The flood had to be led onto the fields through canals and held there by dykes, and the canals silted and the dykes broke, and clearing them was annual, compulsory and collective. A village could not do it alone; a district could. The work required somebody with the authority to summon the labour and the records to know who owed it, and it had to happen every year before the water came, or the year's crop failed. Whatever else changed at Fustat, that had to keep running.

Set that beside the men who took the country. The Kutama lived in mountains, were not taxed, and could and repeatedly did walk away from any arrangement they disliked — which is why the Fatimids spent forty years suppressing them and why an order that could hold Mahdia could not hold Ifriqiya. The Egyptian cultivator had none of those options, which is why the conquest of Egypt did not require his consent and did not seek it. Between February and July of 969 the name at the top of the register changed. The register, the canal, the flood and the assessment did not.

The floor in Egypt was not, in the first instance, the army. It was the desert, and the army was what stood between the population and the only thing that fed it.

Reading the floor against the framework

Four things, and the first is the contribution.

One: an apex is switchable only to a claimant who asks for the switch and nothing more. A claimant who asks for a conversion as well has to fight for it — and the same conqueror will do both, in the same lifetime, if he learns.

The collection has established that resistance to a conquest varies inversely with the switchability of the local apex: a country with a single re-sourceable head changes hands without battles, and a country that presents no such head must be taken by siege. This case runs the test twice, with the same dynasty, the same doctrine and much the same army, and gets opposite results — which means switchability cannot be a property of the conquered country alone.

Ifriqiya in 902 had a perfectly good apex. The Aghlabid emirate was a hereditary governorship over an established Arab-Islamic province with a legal establishment, a

fiscal system, a chancery and a capital; a claimant who wanted only to replace the name could have had it more cheaply than in seven years of siege work. What the Fatimids were offering was not a replacement of the name. It was a different confession, delivered by a Berber army from mountains the province had never taxed, to a Maliki legal establishment whose whole function was certifying orthodoxy. There was no seat in that arrangement a Fatimid could occupy, because the seat had a creed attached and the claimant proposed to change the creed. So it had to be fought for, town by town, and it went on having to be fought for — in the Kutama risings, in the towns, and for three years against a man on a donkey.

Egypt in 969 was offered the other thing. The document Jawhar issued at Tarruja promises the legal schools, the call to prayer, the fast, the mosques, the judges, the pilgrimage, the protected communities and the customary practice — every item a continuation. The Egyptians asked for a guarantee of their persons, their property, their lands *and all their circumstances*, and received it in writing before a shot was fired at Fustat. What changed hands was the name in the Friday sermon and the destination of the revenue. On those terms an apex is switchable, and Egypt was switched in five months by an army that had spent seven years failing to switch a smaller and poorer country.

State it as a rule: **before asking whether a conquered order has a capturable head, ask what the conqueror is proposing to put in it.** The variable is not the shape of the conquered apparatus alone but the fit between that apparatus and the claim, and a conqueror who narrows his claim at the moment of the transfer buys the country at a discount. The corollary is a debt: what is bought that way is bought on terms, and the terms are a promise to change nothing, made by a dynasty whose reason for existing was that everything ought to change. This study will have to watch that bill come due.

Two: the design of a capital is a confession about the direction the danger is expected from, and it is made early, expensively and in public. In 916 a caliph who claimed headship of the whole community of Islam put his residence on a peninsula, cut a ditch across the neck of it, and built one gate. The ditch faces the province he had just conquered. He had killed the commander of his own army five years earlier and had spent the interval putting down that army's revolts. Nothing about the Byzantines or the Abbasids explains a landward ditch.

The general instruction is cheap to apply and hard to evade, because fortification is slow, costly and cannot be revised for the record: identify what a ruling group spends its founding capital defending itself from, and you have its own private estimate of who its enemies are, made before the enemies arrived and uncontaminated by anything it later said. Mahdia's estimate was correct, and the correctness is dated to the eight

months in 944 and 945 when the Fatimid caliph sat behind that gate while the Ibadi preacher who had taken the rest of his country sat outside it.

Three: a population outside the fiscal machine is where the machine's replacement is recruited, and it is outside for the same reason it is recruitable. The Aghlabids did not tax the Kutama because the Kutama were expensive to reach; the Kutama were available to Abu Abdallah because nothing in the arrangement gave them a stake in it and nothing in it gave the government a means of watching them. These are not two facts. A state's untaxed periphery is not a blank on the map but a standing offer, and the size of the offer is the size of the population that has no career inside the order and no reason to defend it.

The test follows: find the districts a state does not assess and does not garrison, and you have found where an insurgency will be raised if one is raised, before anybody has raised it. It will not be raised by the taxed and the watched, whatever their grievances, because their grievances run through the machine and produce petitions.

Four, compounding what the landscape established: a conquest can be forgotten in a generation and a confession cannot, because only one of them has a name that goes into documents. The Kutama stormed al-Aribus in March 909 and massacred it. Thirty-five years later the same town, arranging its surrender to a rebel, wrote its safe-conduct so as to exclude Fatimid officials and Ismailis from protection. What survived in that town was not a memory of a battle — battles were common — but a category, and the category was the ruler's creed.

That is the same mechanism the landscape found running in the other direction. A grievance that acquires a permanent name is transmissible; it can be handed to people who did not suffer the injury, because it no longer requires the injury, only the label. In Baghdad the label was carried in a calendar and produced a liturgy that outlived every political circumstance. In al-Aribus it was carried in a legal formula and produced a clause. Both are the same finding seen from the two sides of a conquest, and both are the reason an order whose founding claim is confessional cannot get the benefit of being forgotten.

A note on sources. The opening of Jawhar's *amān* and the sentence on the purpose of the expedition are quoted in Arabic exactly as reproduced from al-Maqrizi's *Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ* in the modern Arabic literary scholarship on Fatimid chancery prose; the translations are mine. The document is medieval and therefore out of copyright in its original, but this study did not obtain the full text in the original, and the summary of its remaining clauses — the legal schools, the call to prayer and the fast, the maintenance and staffing of mosques, the pilgrimage roads, the war against the Byzantines, the removal of unlawful exactions, the treatment of the protected

communities — is paraphrased from the modern scholarship, principally Shainool Jiwa, and is credited as such. That is a real limitation and it is stated here rather than buried: the most important single argument in this module rests on a document quoted in part from the original and summarised in part at second hand. A reader who wants to test the argument should test it there first.

The *amān* survives through two independent lines — al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), a Sunni Egyptian working under the Mamluks, and Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), a Tayyibi Ismaili working in Yemen. Both are roughly five centuries downstream of the event. Their independence is the strongest thing about the text and is the reason it is relied on here as heavily as it is.

The Ifriqiyan campaign of 902–909 — Mila, Sétif, Belezma, the Aghlabid push to Dar Malul in 907, Tobna, Baghaya, Maydara, Constantine, the winter campaign around the Chott el-Djerid, the muster at al-Aribus, and the battle there on Saturday 18 March 909 decided by a flanking unit of 575 Kutama coming up a streambed at the time of the *asr* prayer, followed by the unconditional surrender, massacre and looting of al-Aribus on 19 March — follows the modern scholarship, principally Heinz Halm, which rests in turn substantially on al-Qadi al-Nu'man's *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa*. That is the dynasty's own chief jurist writing from inside the successful state, and it is a partisan account; its precision on small numbers and its roundness on large ones is noted in the text and is the reason the figures of 100,000 and 200,000 for the Kutama army are reported as traditional numbers and used for nothing.

The flight of Ziyadat Allah III on 25 March 909, the entry into Raqqada, the amnesty and the distribution of spoils, the taking of Sijilmasa on 26 August 909, the proclamation of al-Mahdi, the entry into Raqqada in January 910, the destruction of the Rustamid imamate at Tahert, and the execution of Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i and his brother in February 911 by a Kutama commander, follow the standard accounts. The precise day of the execution is given as 18 February in most modern accounts and 28 February in some, and is given here only as February 911. The two competing explanations of the killing are reported as the two traditions' explanations and neither is adopted.

The foundation of Mahdia — site chosen 912, construction from 916, the ditch across the neck of the peninsula, the Skifa Kahla with its vaulted passage of some fifty metres, the Great Mosque of 916 without a minaret and with a single monumental entrance, and the inauguration on 20 February 921 — follows the standard architectural and reference accounts. The surviving fabric has been much rebuilt, in the sixteenth century and again by archaeologists in the 1960s, and the entrance façade of the mosque is the principal Fatimid-period survival; the argument here rests on the

plan and the siting, which are not in dispute, rather than on the elevation. Dates for the foundation vary in the popular literature between 912 and 921 because the site was chosen, built and inaugurated in different years; the sequence given here is the one the specialist literature supports. One vivid saying attributed to al-Mahdi on completing the city circulates widely and could not be verified against a source reproducing it, and has therefore been dropped rather than reconstructed.

Abu Yazid's revolt of 944–947, the siege of Mahdia, the death of the second Fatimid caliph in 946 with the revolt still running, and the safe-conduct granted to al-Aribus on 7 August 944 excluding Fatimid officials and adherents of Ismailism, follow the modern scholarship on the revolt. That last detail carries real weight in this module and rests on a single reported document transmitted at second hand; it is the module's weakest load-bearing item after the *amān*, and a reader who declines it loses the al-Aribus pairing but not the argument about the capital's design, which stands on the fortification alone.

The three earlier invasions of Egypt (914–915, 919–921, and the attempt of the mid-930s), the destruction of the Fatimid fleet in March 920, the arrival of Abbasid relief under Mu'nis, the stockpiling from 965 or 966, the departure from Raqqada on 6 February 969, the fall of Alexandria, the camp at Tarruja, the crossing of the Nile between 29 June and 3 July, the submission of Fustat on 6 July and the *khuṭba* in al-Mu'izz's name on 9 July, and the marking out of al-Qahira, follow the standard reference accounts, which are consistent on the sequence. Al-Maqrizi's report that the expedition cost twenty-four million dinars to prepare, and the tradition's figure of a hundred thousand men, are traditional numbers, are not used, and are named here only so that a reader meeting them elsewhere knows they were considered and set aside.

Jawhar's origins are contested in the sources themselves, which call him al-Siqilli (the Sicilian), al-Rumi (the Greek) and al-Saqlabi (the Slav); that he was a slave by origin is not contested, and is stated in his own document. His birth is given variously between about 911 and 928. The Syrian sequence — the taking of Damascus in 970, the defeat and death of Ja'far ibn Fallah outside it in August 971, the Qarmatian advance to Ayn Shams and their repulse, and the second Qarmatian invasion of 974 — follows the standard accounts; the date of the battle outside Cairo is given in some accounts as December 970 and in others as the winter of 971, and is left here as the winter of 971 with the discrepancy noted.

The Basasiri episode — the seizure of Baghdad at the end of 1058, the removal of the Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im from the city, the reading of the *khuṭba* in the name of al-Mustansir, the despatch of the Abbasid regalia to Cairo, the withdrawal without battle on Tughril's return, and the restoration of the Abbasid caliph in December 1059 —

follows the standard accounts. The date of al-Basasiri's own death is given in the reference literature as both January 1059 and January 1060; since he is agreed to have held Baghdad for about a year from the end of 1058 and to have been killed after Tughril's return, the later date is the coherent one, and the discrepancy is flagged rather than resolved. Nothing in the argument turns on it.

The description of Egypt's enclosure, of the annual canal and dyke maintenance and its coordination, and of the Kutama's untaxed position in the Lesser Kabylie, is drawn from the standard geographical and administrative accounts and is paraphrased. The first attestation of the Kutama name in Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. c. 885) is from the geographical literature.

MODULE 2

Not Even for a Single Dinar

The settlement — what the conquest distributed, to whom, in what form, and the one decision inside it that shaped everything the order could afterwards do.

The first distribution

When Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i entered Raqqada on the twenty-fifth of March 909 he did two things in the same week, and the two together are the founding settlement of Ifriqiya.

He proclaimed an amnesty to the people of Qayrawan. And he distributed the spoils to the Kutama.

An amnesty costs the giver nothing and buys the recipient's silence; it is the cheapest instrument in the repertoire and it was used here for exactly what it is worth. The spoils cost somebody, and the somebody was the province. What that distribution established, in the first days, was that the men who had done the fighting would be paid out of the country they had taken, and that the country's function in the new arrangement was to be the source of that payment.

This is the ordinary settlement of a conquest made by tribesmen and it has an ordinary consequence, which arrived on schedule. The risings of the following decades — and there were a great many, among the Kutama themselves, among the Zenata and Sanhaja, in the towns — were very largely about the exactions of the Kutama. A confederation that has been promised the spoils of a province does not stop collecting them when the spoils run out; it goes on collecting, and what it collects afterwards is called taxation by the government and robbery by the taxed, and both descriptions are accurate.

The Fatimids spent forty years on that problem in Ifriqiya and never solved it. What matters for this module is that when they took Egypt sixty years later they did not repeat it. The second settlement was built on a different principle from the first, and the difference was deliberate.

Ground, assigned by origin

On the day Jawhar took Fustat he went a short distance north of it, onto open ground where there was almost nothing — a garden that had belonged to the Ikhshid, and a Christian monastery called Dayr al-'Izam, the Convent of the Bones, so named

for the relics kept in it — and began marking out a rectangle. It ran roughly a kilometre by a kilometre and a quarter, aligned on the canal, with a single north–south thoroughfare down the middle of it. Al-Mu'izz had given him the plan before he left Ifriqiya; it reproduced al-Mansuriya, the Fatimid palace city outside Qayrawan, and the new enclosure was at first given the same name. It was renamed al-Qahira when the caliph arrived.

Inside the rectangle the eastern palace went up between 969 and 972, and the western palace under the next caliph, with a parade ground between them. The rest of the enclosure was divided among the army — and it was divided by origin.

The nineteenth-century editor of the traveller Nasir-i Khusraw, summarising al-Maqrizi's topography of Cairo, puts the arrangement in one sentence: *"Les tribus et les peuples étrangers qui avaient fourni des soldats à l'armée de Djauher reçurent chacun un emplacement pour y construire un quartier qui leur fut affecté"* — the tribes and foreign peoples who had furnished soldiers to Jawhar's army each received a plot on which to build a quarter assigned to them.

The names stuck, and they are the settlement's registry. The Zuwayla quarter took its name from a town in the Qayrawan district and a suburb of Mahdia, because the soldiers from those places called their new ground after home. The Judariyya quarter was named for a corps of four hundred men originally commanded by Jawdhar, an officer of the first Fatimid caliph, and was afterwards inhabited by Jews. The Daylam quarter got its name when Daylamite troops who had come in with an adventurer from the east took refuge in Cairo in 970. There was a quarter of the Rum, a quarter of the amirs, a quarter of the Masamida, a quarter called after the eunuch Barjawan who ran the palaces and then the state and was murdered in it in 1000, and a quarter called ʿAbīd al-Shirāʾ — the Purchased Slaves.

A city whose lanes are named after the regiments that built them is a settlement written into the ground, and written in a form that cannot easily be revised. Half of the names on that list are the names of places the men had come from; the other half are the names of what they were — a corps, a purchase, a nationality. Not one of them is Egyptian.

The muster roll

Some seventy-five years after the enclosure was traced, a Persian traveller stood in Cairo and watched the whole army pass.

Nasir-i Khusraw was an Ismaili — a convert, and later one of the most important figures of the Persian branch of the mission — who reached Egypt in 1047 and stayed about three years. He is a partisan witness in the sense that he admired what he saw. He

is also an outsider with no stake in Egyptian factional politics, writing a travel account rather than a chronicle, and describing things that were happening in front of him. His *Safarnama* is the best single description of the Fatimid state at its height that survives from anyone who was there.

He watched the caliph ride out for the annual breaking of the canal dyke, and the whole army turned out for it in its divisions, and he wrote down what each division was called and how many men he was told it had.

The first corps were the Kutama, come from Qayrawan with al-Mu'izz: twenty thousand horse. Then the Batili, Maghribis who had settled in Egypt before al-Mu'izz arrived, also mounted: fifteen thousand. Then the Masmudi, black, from the Masmuda country: twenty thousand. Then the *Mashariqa*, the Easterners, Turks and Persians — called Easterners, he explains, because they were not of Arab origin, although most of them had been born in Egypt: ten thousand. Then the 'Abīd al-Shirā', the slaves bought for money: thirty thousand. Then Bedouin of the Hijaz, fifty thousand horse, every man with a lance. Then the *Ustādh*, black and white slaves bought for various services: thirty thousand. Then the *Sarā'ī*, palace servants on foot, come from every country, each fighting with the weapons of his own homeland, under a commander responsible for their upkeep: ten thousand. And the Zanj, who all fought with the sword: thirty thousand.

The total is a hundred and ninety-five thousand men in the fighting corps, and something over two hundred thousand with the palace establishment, and it is not a real number. Nasir-i Khusraw says of several of the corps that he was told the figure; the round twenty and thirty thousands are the arithmetic of a spectator counting a parade. No serious estimate of the Fatimid standing army approaches it. The list is used here for none of its numbers.

It is used for its shape, and the shape is exact and verifiable against everything else known about the Fatimid army. There are nine named corps. Every one of them is defined by an origin outside Egypt or by the condition of having been purchased. Berbers of three separate groups, Turks and Persians, Bedouin from Arabia, black Africans in two categories, bought slaves in two more, and a palace corps drawn from everywhere. Not one of them is Egyptian.

Egypt in 1047 had been under this dynasty for seventy-eight years. It had at least two and a half million people, probably more. It supplied the entire revenue, the grain, the flax, the shipping, the clerks and the money. It supplied not one soldier.

Not even for a single dinar

Immediately after the list, Nasir-i Khusraw says how all these men were paid, and this is the most important sentence in this module:

> *"Toutes ces troupes sont à la solde du sultan et chaque homme reçoit, selon son grade, des rations et une paye mensuelle. Jamais le fisc ne donne d'assignation, même pour un dinar, ni sur les fonctionnaires, ni sur les sujets, car les percepteurs versent d'année en année au fisc les sommes prélevées dans le pays, et le Trésor donne, à des époques déterminées, l'argent nécessaire pour leur solde et leur entretien. Les fonctionnaires et les populations n'ont donc nullement à souffrir des exigences des soldats."*
> *"All these troops are in the sultan's pay, and each man receives, according to his rank, rations and a monthly wage. Never does the treasury make an assignment, not even for a single dinar, either upon officials or upon subjects; for the collectors pay in to the treasury year by year the sums levied in the country, and the Treasury issues at fixed times the money required for their pay and their maintenance. Officials and populations therefore have nothing whatever to suffer from the demands of the soldiers."*

An eyewitness, in the middle of the eleventh century, states the principle of the Fatimid settlement in a form that leaves nothing to be inferred. Every dinar of tax went up to the centre. Every dinar of pay came down from the centre. Not one soldier in that army had a claim on any taxpayer, any district, any village or any office. There was no intermediary and there was no assignment.

The administrative name for the arrangement is on the record too. The bureau that handled it was the *dīwān al-juyūsh wa'l-rawātib* — the department of the armies **and salaries**, the two words joined in the title of the office. Under al-Hakim the salaries were paid eight times a year; by al-Mustansir's reign they had gone to monthly, which is what Nasir-i Khusraw describes, and monthly is what it stayed until the end.

It is worth being clear about how unusual this was in its moment. The Islamic world of the tenth and eleventh centuries was moving hard in the opposite direction. The Buyids in Iraq, unable to meet a payroll out of a collapsing Sawad, had been converting soldiers' pay into assignments on land revenue — *iqṭāʿ* — since the 940s, and the Seljuks after them turned that into the standard method of maintaining an army across the whole eastern half of the Islamic world. Fatimid Egypt did not follow. It went on paying cash, out of a central treasury, into the hands of individual soldiers, for two centuries. The full military assignment system arrived in Egypt only with Saladin, who imposed it in 1169 as vizier and completed it after 1171 — which is to say

that the conversion of Egypt to *iqṭāʿ* and the extinction of the Fatimid caliphate were the same operation, carried out by the same man, in the same three years.

Why did they choose cash? Not, in the first instance, out of administrative virtue. Read the choice off the position of the men making it.

An army of foreigners cannot be assigned to land. An assignment means a soldier collecting his own income from a district's cultivators, and a Kutama Berber or a purchased Turk sitting on an Egyptian village would have needed a garrison to collect anything, would have generated exactly the grievance that had wrecked Ifriqiya, and would within a generation have become a local landholder with local interests. The Fatimids had run that experiment in Ifriqiya in 909 and were still paying for it.

And Egypt made cash easy in a way almost nowhere else did. The revenue was already centralised, because the flood was measured at one point on one island and the assessment followed the reading; the registers were three centuries old; the collection ran through a bureaucracy the conquerors had inherited intact. A state that can put a number on the year's harvest in the spring can budget a payroll. Very few medieval states could.

Above all, cash keeps soldiers dependent. A man with an assignment has an estate; a man with a monthly wage has a paymaster. Everything in the Fatimid arrangement — the quarters inside the caliph's own enclosure, the rations, the monthly payment, the corps defined by foreign origin — points the same way, and the way it points is that no armed man in Egypt was to have any means of subsistence that did not pass through the palace.

Nasir-i Khusraw thought this admirable, and by the standard he was applying he was right: the taxpayer was not being squeezed by soldiers, and that was rare enough to be worth recording. But the sentence has a second face, and the second face is the whole of this dynasty's later history. An order whose army eats only from the treasury is an order whose army stops eating the moment the treasury does.

The offices

The distribution of offices followed the same rule as the distribution of ground, and it is the point at which the settlement stops looking like a normal conquest.

The man who took the country signed himself, in the founding document, *slave of the Commander of the Faithful*, and was one. Jawhar governed Egypt as viceroy for four years and was dismissed in 979.

The man who built the administration was Ya'qub ibn Killis, born in Baghdad about 930 into a Jewish family, brought to Egypt as a young man, employed by the Ikhshidid regent Kafur as an expert in revenue, converted to Islam in 967 — two years

before the conquest, and for reasons that had nothing to do with the Fatimids — arrested by a rival after Kafur's death, and escaped west to al-Mu'izz. He came back with the conquerors, took over the civil administration in 974, and in 977 or 979 was made *al-wazīr al-ajall*, the most exalted minister. He held the office, with one two-month interruption, until his death in 991. The vizierate as a Fatimid institution is his; so is the reconstruction of the fiscal bureaux and the stabilisation of the coinage.

Nasir-i Khusraw, seventy years later, records the composition of the senior service in eight words: *"Tous les hauts fonctionnaires du sultan sont ou des Nègres ou des Grecs"* — all the sultan's high officials are either blacks or Greeks.

He means what the Persian behind his French renders: men of sub-Saharan African origin and men from Byzantine territory. He means, in other words, slaves and the descendants of slaves, and foreigners. Written by an admirer, in passing, as a piece of description rather than a complaint.

Below that level, the bureaux ran on Copts and Jews, and the Geniza correspondence shows the Jewish officials of the fiscal service — called *sar* in the Hebrew documents — placing their coreligionists in posts and protecting them, and shows the friction with Christian officials doing the same for theirs. The evidence there is private letters written for no audience, which is why it is worth more than any chronicle. There was a ceiling, and it can be stated precisely: Jews held important posts and did not become viziers; Christians occasionally did; the one Jew who reached the vizierate had converted twelve years before he got it.

So set out the settlement as it actually stood by the end of the tenth century. The army was Berber, black African, Turkish, Bedouin and purchased, and lived inside the caliph's enclosure on a monthly wage. The senior administration was held by slaves, freedmen and foreigners. The revenue bureaux were staffed largely by Copts and Jews. The apex of the judiciary went to the sect: the Ismaili jurist al-Qadi al-Nu'man and his descendants held the chief qadiship of Egypt for the better part of a century, while the population went on being judged in the schools guaranteed to them in the *amān*.

And the Sunni Muslim Egyptian — the majority of the Muslim population of the richest province in the Islamic world — received, in this distribution, nothing in particular. Not a corps, not a command, not a quarter, not the chief judgeship, not the vizierate. He kept his law, his mosque, his fast and his Friday prayer, exactly as promised. He was written out of everything else, and he was written out of it by a document that had promised to change nothing and had kept the promise to the letter.

The pensioners and the domain

Two further items belong in the ledger because they show what the surplus was for.

Nasir-i Khusraw describes a body of men in the caliph's procession who were not part of the army at all: the sons of kings and princes from other countries who had come to Egypt — from the Maghrib, Yemen, Byzantium, the land of the Slavs, Nubia and Abyssinia, Georgia, the Daylamite emirates, the Khaqan of the Turks, and the sons of an Indian ruler whose mother had settled in Cairo with them. None of them received less than five hundred dinars in pension; some received two thousand. *"Ils n'avaient d'autre devoir à remplir que celui de se rendre à l'audience du Vézir et de le saluer, après quoi ils regagnaient leur domicile"* — they had no duty to perform but to attend the vizier's audience and salute him, after which they went home.

That is a hostage system operated as a pension scheme, and it is a good indication of how much money there was. A state that keeps the heirs of a dozen foreign dynasties in idleness at two thousand dinars a head is a state with a surplus it does not know what to do with, and it is also a state buying insurance in every direction at once.

And there was the caliph's own estate. The canal that ran from Fustat through Cairo past the palace was crown property, and Nasir-i Khusraw records that three hundred and sixty villages along its banks belonged to the sovereign's private domain. Inside the palace there were said to be twelve thousand servants on wages, and the whole establishment was put at thirty thousand persons. A thousand men — five hundred horse and five hundred foot — guarded it every night, sounding trumpets and drums from the evening prayer and patrolling till daybreak. From outside the city it looked like a mountain; from inside the city you could not see it at all, because the walls were too high.

What was promised and what was delivered

The *amān* of 969 promised the Egyptians their persons, their property, their lands and all their circumstances; their legal schools; the call to prayer and the fast as they had them; the mosques maintained and those who served them paid; the pilgrimage roads secured; the war carried to the Byzantines; unlawful exactions removed; the protected communities left on their established footing.

Set that beside the settlement and there is no contradiction anywhere in it. Every promise was kept, most of them for two hundred years. The Sunni schools continued; the mosques were maintained and endowed; the pilgrimage was secured; the Christians and Jews kept their arrangements and in fact did better under this dynasty than under most; the taxpayer was not preyed on by soldiers, and an eyewitness who had no reason to lie about it says so.

What the document did not say is what the settlement actually did, and it did not say it because nobody had asked. It did not say that the country would be garrisoned by

an army recruited entirely outside it and quartered in a walled city built next door for the purpose. It did not say that the senior offices would go to slaves and foreigners. It did not say that the chief judgeship would pass to a family of jurists of a school no Egyptian followed. It did not say that the surplus would fund the sons of Georgian and Nubian princes at five hundred dinars a head.

There is no lie in the gap. The delegation at Tarruja had asked for a guarantee of what it had, and it got one, and it kept what it had. It had not asked for a share of what was coming, because it did not occur to anyone in July 969 to ask a conquering army for a share of the government. The information asymmetry here is not between a public statement and a private one. It is between the question that was asked and the question that was not, and the settlement lived in the second.

Reading the settlement against the framework

Three things.

One, the contribution: an army paid in coin from the centre and an army paid in assigned land fail in opposite ways, and the choice between them is almost always made for reasons that have nothing to do with the failure it produces.

The collection has treated the settlement as a question of *who got what*. This case shows that the *form* of the payment is a separate variable and possibly a more powerful one, because it determines the shape of the eventual collapse before anybody can see the collapse coming.

Cash from the centre does exactly what the Fatimids wanted. It keeps every armed man dependent on the palace; it prevents the army from putting down roots in the country; it stops soldiers preying on taxpayers, which is not a small thing and which a hostile witness would have had no reason to invent. It requires, and Egypt uniquely supplied, a revenue that can be forecast in the spring and collected through an inherited bureaucracy.

And it removes every buffer between a fiscal shock and a military one. An army holding land assignments meets a bad harvest by squeezing its own cultivators harder; the state weakens at the edges, slowly, over decades, as the assignments harden into estates and the assignees into a provincial nobility. An army on a monthly wage meets a bad harvest by not being paid, and an unpaid soldier in a walled city with his own weapons, his own quarter and his own ethnic corps has exactly two options and neither of them is patience.

State it as a rule: **paying an army in coin converts every fiscal crisis directly into a military crisis at the capital, with nothing in between; paying it in land converts every fiscal crisis into a slow decentralisation at the periphery.** Both are ways of

losing a state. The first loses it quickly and at the centre; the second loses it gradually and at the edges. The instruction that follows is diagnostic rather than prescriptive: find out how a state pays its soldiers, and you know in advance which way it will come apart, and roughly how fast, long before there is anything to see.

The confirmation is on the record and it is unusually clean. Egypt was paying cash in 1047 and an eyewitness marvelled at it. In the 1060s the treasury emptied, the Turkish and black African corps fought each other in the streets of Cairo, one drove the other into Upper Egypt, and the government ceased to function. And the man who ended the Fatimid caliphate in 1171 had begun, in 1169, by converting the Egyptian army from salaries to land assignments. The two operations were the same operation.

Two, compounding the last module's finding: an order that will not form the population it rules must also not arm it, and having armed nobody local it has no local constituency when its own troops turn on each other.

Nine corps, and not one Egyptian. This was not carelessness. An army raised in Egypt would have had to be an army of Sunni Egyptians, and arming the confession you are claiming to have superseded is not a thing a regime does twice. So the country supplied the money and not the men, and the men were fetched from Kabylia, the Sahara, the Sudan, Anatolia, the Slav lands and the slave markets, and quartered behind a wall.

The cost of that arrangement is invisible while the money holds and total when it stops. When the corps fought each other in the 1060s there was nobody to appeal to. There was no Egyptian militia, no provincial levy, no armed interest with a stake in the dynasty's survival, because the settlement had been designed from the first week to ensure there was not. A ruler who has made certain that no subject can threaten him has also made certain that no subject can save him.

Three: a settlement that has to be written into the ground is a settlement that expects to be disputed. The lanes of al-Qahira were assigned by origin and kept the names of the regiments that built them for five hundred years — Zuwayla, the Daylam, the Judariyya, the Purchased Slaves. Compare the thing it was laid over: an Egyptian fiscal order three centuries old that needed no map of who was who, because everybody already knew, and whose registers recorded land and liability rather than nation and corps.

The general point is that the granularity of a settlement's record-keeping measures the settlement's confidence. An arrangement that has become the furniture of reality does not need to write down which people live in which lane. One that is seventy-five years old, garrisoned by nine nationalities and superintended from behind a wall, does.

A note on sources. The muster list, the sentence on military pay, the observation that all high officials were blacks or Greeks, the pensioned foreign princes, the three hundred and sixty villages of the caliph's private domain along the canal, the palace establishment and its night guard, and the ceremony of the breaking of the dyke, are all from Nasir-i Khusraw's *Safarnama*, quoted from Charles Schefer's edition and French translation of 1881, which is public domain. That is a translation and not the original: the Persian is not reproduced here, and every quotation in this module from Nasir-i Khusraw is therefore at one remove, with Schefer's reading of the manuscripts standing between the reader and the traveller. Schefer notes at least one place in this passage where he has emended the manuscripts, and where his notes rather than the traveller's text are being used — the tracing of the enclosure, the allotment of quarters to the corps, and the origin of each quarter's name, all of which he takes from al-Maqrizi's topography of Cairo — that is said so in the text. A reader who wants to press the argument should press it against the Persian.

Nasir-i Khusraw's numbers are not used for anything and should not be. He himself flags several of them as hearsay, and the total of roughly two hundred thousand under arms is not credible as a muster of the Fatimid standing army; it is a spectator's estimate of a parade, rounded to the nearest ten thousand. The list is relied on for the *names and origins of the corps*, which are independently attested in the quarter-names of Cairo and in the modern scholarship on the Fatimid army, and for the statement about how they were paid, which is a statement about administrative method rather than quantity.

The *dīwān al-juyūsh wa'l-rawātib* and its function, the shift from eight annual payments under al-Hakim to monthly payments under al-Mustansir, and the persistence of cash payment to the end of the dynasty, are from the modern scholarship, principally Claude Cahen and Yaacov Lev, paraphrased and credited. The Buyid turn to *iqṭāʿ* from the 940s, its generalisation under the Seljuks, and Saladin's imposition of the system in Egypt from 1169, likewise. The claim in the closing section that *iqṭāʿ* was essentially absent from the Fatimid settlement is the module's most exposed general statement: assignments of revenue certainly existed in Fatimid Egypt, particularly in the last century, and what is asserted here is that they were not the basis on which the army was maintained. Nasir-i Khusraw's sentence is the strongest single piece of evidence for that and it is one man's sentence about one moment. A reader who thinks the eleventh-century picture cannot be run back to 969 or forward to 1150 is entitled to the doubt, and the argument in Module 10 will have to earn it rather than assume it.

The layout of al-Qahira — the rectangle of roughly a kilometre by a kilometre and a quarter aligned on the canal, the plan supplied by al-Mu'izz and copied from al-

Mansuriya, the initial name and the renaming, the eastern palace of 969–972 and the western palace under al-Aziz, the parade ground between them — follows the standard architectural and reference accounts. Precise dimensions vary in the literature and are given here as approximate. The date on which the enclosure was traced is given differently in different sources, including in Schefer's own note, whose conversion of the hijri date appears to be a slip; the module says only that Jawhar began marking it out on taking Fustat in July 969 and that the palace walls were finished in 970, which is not disputed. Al-Azhar was founded in 970 and completed in 972; Schefer's note gives 973 for the completion, and the discrepancy is unresolved and immaterial here.

Ya'qub ibn Killis — born in Baghdad about 930 to a Jewish family, in Kafur's service, converted to Islam in 967, in charge of the civil administration from 974, vizier from 977 or 979 until his death in 991, with a dismissal and fine in 983–4 — follows the standard reference accounts, which differ on whether the vizierate dates from 977 or 979 and on the exact year of his death (990 or 991). Both ranges are given. The role of Jewish and Christian officials in the fiscal bureaux, the Hebrew title *sar*, the mutual patronage and the friction between the two communities' officials, and the observation that Jews did not reach the vizierate while some Christians did, are paraphrased from the Geniza scholarship, principally S. D. Goitein and Mark Cohen, and credited. The holding of the chief qadiship of Egypt by al-Qadi al-Nu'man and his descendants is from the standard accounts.

The statement that the settlement contained no Egyptian corps is an argument from the absence of one in Nasir-i Khusraw's list and in the quarter-names, and absence of evidence is weaker than evidence. It is offered as what the sources show rather than as a proof, and it is the module's second-weakest load-bearing claim after the *iqṭāʿ* point. Population figures for Egypt are as given in the landscape — somewhere between under three million and above five, none of them reliable — and nothing here turns on them.

The distribution of spoils at Raqqada in 909 and the subsequent risings against Kutama exactions are from the modern scholarship on the Fatimid period in Ifriqiya, paraphrased. The transfer of the Coptic patriarchate from Alexandria to Fustat under Badr al-Jamali during the patriarchate of Cyril II (1078–1092) is from the standard accounts and is not used in this module's argument; it is noted for the module on information and suppression, where it belongs.

MODULE 3

The Most Excellent of the Legatees

The robe — the claim the order made for itself, the medium it chose to carry it, the audience it was actually addressing, and the counter-claim issued from Baghdad in reply.

What the claim actually was

Most dynasties assert that they rule rightfully. This one asserted something with a different logical shape, and the shape has to be got right before anything else in the module makes sense.

The Fatimid ruler was not a caliph who happened to be Shi'i. He was the Imam — the designated heir, in an unbroken chain of designations running back through Isma'il to Ja'far al-Sadiq to Husayn to Ali to the Prophet, of the authority to say what God meant. Isma'ili doctrine holds that revelation does not interpret itself; that the community cannot be trusted to read it; and that God therefore provides, in every generation, one living man whose reading is authoritative. That man is the Imam, and the claim to be him is not a claim to legitimate government. It is a claim to be the only person on earth entitled to settle a question of law.

From which two things follow immediately, and both cost money.

The first is that the claim is genealogical, and therefore checkable, and therefore attackable. A ruler who says God has given him victory is making an assertion nobody can falsify. A ruler who says he is the son of the son of the son of Ali has made a statement of fact about which other people can produce documents.

The second is that the claim is total. If the Imam of the age is sitting in Cairo, then the judgments of every Sunni qadi in Baghdad, Nishapur, Córdoba and Qayrawan are void, and the Abbasid in Baghdad is not a rival ruler but a usurper occupying a stolen office. There is no version of this doctrine that leaves room for the other man. Two caliphates can co-exist as a political fact — the Umayyads of Córdoba and the Abbasids of Baghdad managed it for a century — but the Fatimid claim does not permit even the pretence, because it is not about jurisdiction. It is about who knows.

The regnal names carry it. These men did not use their given names. Sa'id ibn al-Husayn ruled as *al-Mahdī bi'llāh*, the rightly guided by God; his successors as *al-Qā'im bi-amr Allāh*, he who rises by God's command; *al-Manṣūr bi'llāh*, made victorious by God; *al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh*, he who renders God's religion mighty; *al-'Azīz bi'llāh*; *al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh*, he who judges by God's command. Each is a

sentence with God as the agent and the ruler as the object, and each was minted, inscribed and pronounced from every pulpit in the territory every Friday. The Abbasids had used such titles too, and the form was not new. What was new was that in Cairo the titles were not honorifics attached to an office. They were descriptions of a person.

The inscription on the mosque

Jawhar laid the foundations of a congregational mosque inside the new enclosure in 970, less than a year after taking the country, and it was finished in Ramadan of the year 361 — June or July of 972. It was called al-Azhar. Al-Maqrizi preserved the inscription that ran round the dome of the first portico, to the right of the pulpit and the prayer-niche, and it is the earliest surviving statement of the Fatimid claim in Egypt:

> *"Au nom du Dieu clément et miséricordieux! Celui qui a ordonné la construction de cette mosquée est le serviteur de Dieu et son vicaire Abou Temim Ma'add, l'imam el Mouïzz lidin illah, prince des fidèles. Que Dieu répande ses bénédictions sur ses aïeux et ses augustes enfants! Cette tâche a été remplie par son esclave Djauher le Katib, originaire de la Sicile, l'an trois cent soixante."*
> *"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. He who ordered the building of this mosque is the servant of God and His deputy, Abu Tamim Ma'add, the Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, Commander of the Faithful. May God pour His blessings upon his forefathers and upon his noble children. This task was carried out by his slave Jawhar the secretary, of Sicilian origin, in the year three hundred and sixty."*

Everything is in it. *Servant of God and His deputy* — not, as the Abbasids generally had it, deputy of the Messenger of God, but deputy of God directly, which is a considerably larger claim and was recognised as one. *The Imam* — the sectarian title, placed in the middle of the caliphal one, on the wall of the state's principal mosque, in the first three years. And then the blessing, which is the load-bearing clause: *upon his forefathers and upon his noble children*. The line is asserted backwards and forwards in a single phrase. The building is dated by a man who is claiming that his ancestry and his posterity are the reason the building has authority.

And it was executed, the inscription says, by *his slave Jawhar*. The man who conquered Egypt is named on the founding monument in the same words he used of himself in the safe-conduct.

Three rings of gold

The mosque wall was seen by the people of one city. The coin went everywhere.

The Fatimid gold dinar of the tenth and eleventh centuries was the most trusted piece of money in the Mediterranean world. It was struck at a fineness that traders relied on without assay; it circulated in Christian Italy, in Byzantine ports, along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean routes and across the Sahara; the Geniza merchants of Fustat priced their consignments in it from Spain to India. And from the reign of al-Mu'izz the Fatimids abandoned the ordinary layout of an Islamic coin — a legend in the field with a marginal ring around it — in favour of a design with no field at all: three concentric circles of Kufic script filling the whole face, one inside the other.

On the first dinars struck in Egypt after the conquest, dated 358 and 359 and bearing the mint-name Miṣr, the obverse reads outward from the centre. Innermost:

> لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله
> *"There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God."*

Which every Muslim ruler on earth put on his coins. Then, in the middle ring:

> وعلي أفضل الوصيين ووزير خير المرسلين
> *"and Ali is the most excellent of the legatees, and the vizier of the best of the messengers."*

Which no Sunni ruler on earth would have put on anything. The word doing the work is *waṣī* — legatee, executor, the man to whom something has been formally bequeathed. To call Ali the most excellent of the *awṣiyāʾ* is to say that the Prophet left an estate and that Ali was the executor of it, which is the entire Shi'i position in one noun. And it is placed as the second thing on the coin, immediately outside the profession of faith and before anything else, in the position where the ordinary reader's eye goes second.

Outside that, the third ring carries Qur'an 9:33:

> محمد رسول الله أرسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون
> *"Muhammad is the Messenger of God, whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might make it prevail over every religion, though the idolaters be averse."*

And the reverse carries the ruler: *al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh, Commander of the Faithful*, with the mint and the year in the outer ring.

Consider what that object is. It is a piece of gold of unimpeachable weight, which any merchant in the known world will take without argument, and which states in three sentences that authority passed by bequest to Ali, that the man whose name is on the back holds it now, and that this religion is going to prevail over every other. It is the claim, minted, and handed to strangers. A man in Palermo or Aden or Sijilmasa who took a Fatimid dinar in payment was taking the Fatimid argument along with it, and could not decline the argument without declining the gold.

Nobody in the tenth century needed this explained. The Abbasid coinage carried the Abbasid caliph's name for the same reason, and a ruler's name on the coinage and in the Friday sermon were the two recognised marks of sovereignty — which is why, when the Uqaylid amir Qirwash ibn Muqallad switched sides in 1010, what he switched was precisely the sermon and the coin.

The robe faces the competitor

Now the question the framework asks of any justifying story: who was it for?

Look at where the effort went. There was a missionary organisation — the *da'wa* — with a hierarchy of summoners, a graded curriculum, and stations in Yemen, in Sind, in Persia, in Iraq and in the Syrian towns, run from Cairo and funded from Cairo. There was a training institution in the capital that took men in and sent them out. There was a permanent budget for sending arguments into other men's countries. There is no equivalent apparatus for sending arguments into Egyptian villages, and the reason for that will be the subject of the next module.

Look at the geography of the claim's assertions. The coin went to the markets of the Abbasid world. The Jerusalem inscription — Nasir-i Khusraw, standing on the Haram al-Sharif in 1047, records a mosaic inscription on the great portico *"donnant les titres du sultan d'Egypte,"* giving the titles of the sultan of Egypt — put the Fatimid style on the third holiest site in Islam, where the pilgrims of every Muslim country would read it. The Meccan mint struck dinars in al-Mu'izz's name in 363. These are not messages to Egyptians. They are messages to the Muslims of everybody else's territory.

And look at what happened when they worked. In 1010 Qirwash ibn Muqallad, ruling Mosul, Anbar, Mada'in and Kufa, had the sermon read and the coin struck in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim; the chief of the Banu Asad did the same at Hilla. Two years earlier the Shi'a of Baghdad, quarrelling with the Sunnis in the streets, had shouted al-Hakim's name and titles as a slogan. Almost half a century later, in 1058, an unemployed Turkish commander took Baghdad itself and had the sermon read for al-Mustansir.

The robe reached where the army could not. The army never held Baghdad for a day; the argument got the sermon read there.

The reply

The Abbasid caliph al-Qadir answered in November 1011, and the answer is the best single measure of how well the Fatimid claim was working, because nobody convenes the jurists of his capital to certify that a rival is nobody unless a good many people have begun to think the rival is somebody.

He assembled the scholars, judges, jurists and — this is the point of the exercise — a body of Alid sharifs of Baghdad, men of the Prophet's family in good standing, and had them sign. Al-Suyuti records the signatories as *"a body of the learned and the judges and the jurists and the sharifs and the notables and the certified witnesses and the pious."* Among them were the two most eminent Alids of the city, the brothers al-Sharif al-Radi and al-Sharif al-Murtada.

The document reads, in the versions preserved by Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Suyuti and al-Maqrizi:

> إن الناجم بمصر وهو منصور بن نزار المتلقب بالحاكم — حكم الله عليه بالبوار والدمار والخزي والنكال والاستئصال — ابن معد بن إسماعيل بن عبد الرحمن بن سعيد — لا أسعده الله — فإنه لما صار إلى المغرب تسمى بعبيد الله وتلقب بالمهدي، ومن تقدم من سلفه من الأرجاس الأنجاس — عليه وعليهم لعنة الله ولعنة اللاعنين — أدعياء خوارج، ولا نسب لهم في ولد علي بن أبي طالب، ولا يتعلقون منه بسبب، وأنه منزه عن باطلهم، وأن الذي ادعوه من الانتساب إليه باطل وزور
>
> *"That he who has risen up in Egypt — namely Mansur ibn Nizar, styled al-Hakim, may God decree upon him ruin and destruction and disgrace and exemplary punishment and extirpation — son of Ma'add, son of Isma'il, son of Abd al-Rahman, son of Sa'id, whom God give no good fortune, who on going to the Maghrib called himself Ubayd Allah and took the style of al-Mahdi — he and those of his forebears who went before him, the filthy and the unclean, upon him and upon them the curse of God and the curse of all who curse: they are pretenders and Kharijites; they have no descent among the children of Ali ibn Abi Talib, nor any connection with him by any tie; he is clear of their falsehood, and what they have claimed of attachment to him is void and a forgery."*

And after the genealogy, the character:

> وأن هذا الناجم بمصر هو وسلفه كفار فساق فجار ملحدون زنادقة معطلون، وللإسلام جاحدون، ولمذهب الثنوية والمجوسية معتقدون، قد عطلوا الحدود، وأباحوا الفروج، وأحلوا الخمور،

وسفكوا الدماء، وسبوا الأنبياء، ولعنوا السلف وادعوا الربوبية. وكتب في ربيع الآخر من سنة اثنتين وأربعمائة.

"And that this man who has risen in Egypt, he and his forebears, are unbelievers, transgressors, debauchees, deviators, atheists who deny the divine attributes, deniers of Islam, holding the doctrine of the Dualists and the Magians; they have suspended the penalties of the law, permitted fornication, made wine lawful, shed blood, reviled the prophets, cursed the forefathers, and claimed divinity. Written in Rabi' al-Akhir of the year four hundred and two."

It was read from the pulpits across the Abbasid domains.

Set the two texts side by side and notice which one is longer and which one comes first. The theological abuse is a paragraph of boilerplate; every medieval polemic between Muslim powers contains a version of it, and the specific charges — dualism, licence, wine, claiming divinity — are the standard vocabulary of accusation and carry very little information. The genealogy is the document's substance, its opening, its detail, and the reason it needed Alid signatures at all. Ordinary jurists could pronounce a man a heretic; only the Prophet's family could pronounce that he was not the Prophet's family.

That is a very precise piece of evidence about what both sides thought they were arguing over, and about whom they were arguing in front of. The Abbasid caliph did not think it sufficient to say the Fatimids were Shi'a and therefore wrong. He needed to establish that they were not descended from Ali. That is only worth establishing before an audience that already accepts that descent from Ali would matter — which is to say, before the Shi'a and the sympathetic, not before the Sunni establishment, who granted nothing of the kind.

The confirmation is three years later and in the same city. In 404, the Buyid vizier Fakhr al-Mulk permitted the people of the Karkh quarter of Baghdad to hold the Ashura mourning, and the lamentation was performed at the shrines. The same government that had certified the Fatimids as unbelieving pretenders was licensing Shi'i public liturgy within three years. It was not fighting a doctrine. It was fighting a claimant.

This study cannot settle the genealogy and does not try. Both the assertion and the denial are treated here as acts. It is worth recording, though, that the most rigorous historian the medieval Islamic world produced looked at the manifesto four centuries later and did not believe it. Ibn Khaldun, a Sunni Maliki with no stake in the Fatimid case, went through the signatures and observed that the testimony rested on hearsay and on what people in Baghdad happened to believe, most of them being partisans of the Abbasids, and that the historians had simply passed on what they had heard.

What the Egyptians were shown

Meanwhile, in Cairo, there was a spectacle, and it is important to be exact about what kind of thing it was.

Nasir-i Khusraw watched the caliph ride out to cut the canal dyke. Ten thousand horses in gold saddles were led out from the palace stables by hired men, a hundred at a time, with clarions and drums, each man paid three dirhams for the day; camels with litters, mules with gilded harness. The troops paraded by corps. And then, a long way behind all of it, came the caliph — al-Mustansir, nineteen years old — riding a mule with a plain saddle and bridle carrying no gold or silver ornament at all, his head shaved, in a white robe under a long loose tunic. The traveller was told the robe was worth ten thousand dinars. Three hundred Daylamites walked in front of him on foot in Byzantine brocade with half-pikes and axes, their legs bound with strips. Beside him, the only other man mounted, rode the parasol-bearer, in a turban of cloth of gold set with stones and a costume said to be worth another ten thousand dinars, carrying a parasol covered in gems and pearls. Eunuchs walked either side burning ambergris and aloes. And *"l'étiquette exige qu'à l'approche du sultan le peuple se prosterne la face contre terre, et appelle sur lui les bénédictions divines"* — as the sultan approaches, custom requires the people to prostrate themselves face to the ground and call down God's blessings upon him.

The staging is worth reading closely, because it is a very deliberate composition. Everything is magnificent except the man. The horses are gold, the parasol is jewelled, the parasol-*bearer* is dressed at ten thousand dinars — and the Imam of the age rides a mule with an unornamented bridle. That is not modesty. It is the claim: this person does not require ornament, because what he is is not conferred by anything you can see, and the correct response to him is not admiration but prostration.

The Fatimids built an entire year out of this. The processions marked the openings of the fasts and feasts, the Nile, the new year, the Prophet's birthday, and — this is the point at which the landscape's finding comes back — the tenth of Muharram, and the eighteenth of Dhu'l-Hijja. Karbala and Ghadir became state occasions in Cairo, mourned and celebrated by the government, with the caliph appearing. In Baghdad in 963 a soldier had licensed those observances because his troops already held them. In Cairo a century later the Imam presided over them in person, and the liturgy that had been a defeated party's inheritance for three hundred years was being performed by a state.

The last major Fatimid monument makes the claim in stone in the same visual language as the coin. Al-Aqmar, built in 1125 by the vizier al-Ma'mun on the processional avenue beside the palaces, has above its door an openwork medallion

whose centre carries two names, *Muhammad* and *ʿAlī*, ringed by an inscription from the thirty-third sura:

> إنما يريد الله ليذهب عنكم الرجس أهل البيت ويطهركم تطهيرا
> *"God desires only to remove uncleanness from you, O People of the House, and to purify you with a thorough purifying."*

The Fatimids read *ahl al-bayt* as themselves. And the medallion is built as a set of concentric rings around a centre — which is the design of their gold coin, carved in stone, at eye level, on the street where the caliph rode past every new year.

What the robe could not say

So the claim was total, it was carried on the best money in the world, it reached Baghdad and Jerusalem and Sind, and it was performed in the streets of Cairo in front of a prostrate population.

And there is a hole in it, and the hole is the shape of the *amān*.

In July 969 Jawhar had promised the Egyptians, in writing, that their legal schools would stand, their call to prayer and their fast would continue as they were, their mosques would be maintained and staffed, and the protected communities would be left on their established footing. That promise bought the country in five months and it was kept for two centuries.

But the Fatimid claim is a claim about *who is entitled to say what the law is*. A ruler who has guaranteed a population its existing law has, in the same breath, guaranteed it the right to go on taking its law from somebody other than him. The two documents contradict each other, and the contradiction is not incidental; it is between the instrument that acquired the country and the doctrine that justified acquiring it.

The way the contradiction was managed — and it was managed, competently, for two hundred years — was by making sure the two documents addressed different people. The coin legend, the *daʿwa*, the Jerusalem inscription and the missionary curriculum were aimed outward, at the Muslims of other men's countries, where nothing had been promised to anybody. Inward, at the Egyptians, the order sent no argument at all. It sent a procession.

What the Egyptian saw was gold, drums, a mule, a parasol and a man he was required to bow to. What he was not sent was a reason. Nothing in the ceremonial asks anything of him except deference, and deference is not belief; it is a posture, and postures are cheap, and a man can hold one for a lifetime and hand his son the opposite conviction along with it.

Reading the robe against the framework

Three things, the first of which is the contribution and the third of which is a correction to an earlier finding.

One: a justifying claim inscribed on a trusted currency travels the length of the trade rather than the length of the army, arrives inside the competitor's territory in the competitor's own hands, and cannot be refused without refusing the money.

This collection has treated the justifying story as something transmitted by mosques, schools, sermons and processions — which is to say through channels an order controls, inside territory an order holds. The Fatimid coinage is a different mechanism and a more powerful one, and it deserves naming as a distinct instrument rather than as a decorative feature of the coinage.

The mechanics are worth setting out because they are general. A currency that is trusted circulates on account of its metal, not its politics. The trust is what makes it accepted, and the acceptance is unconditional — a merchant in a rival capital who takes the coin is not endorsing anything, he is being paid. But the argument on the face of it arrives all the same, in his hand, repeatedly, from people he does business with, in a form he has every practical reason not to reject. The Fatimid dinar carried into every market between al-Andalus and India a sentence stating that authority had been bequeathed to Ali and now rested with a named man in Cairo. The Fatimid army held Damascus intermittently and Baghdad for a year by proxy. The Fatimid sentence was in circulation everywhere, continuously, for two centuries.

State the rule for testing elsewhere: **where a claim is inscribed on an instrument that people accept for reasons unconnected to the claim — coinage above all, but also weights and measures, seals, standard documents, and the calendar itself — its reach must be measured by the circulation of the instrument and not by the reach of the state.** The corollary is that this is the cheapest propagation there is, because somebody else pays the carriage.

The confirmation is the reply. The manifesto of 1011 is the Abbasid caliph's own estimate, made under no compulsion to flatter his enemy, of how far the Fatimid claim had penetrated his territory; and he issued it the year after an Iraqi amir switched his sermon and his coinage to Cairo. A counter-claim is a receipt for the effectiveness of the claim it answers.

Two, compounding the landscape's finding: the two sides fought over the genealogy and not the doctrine, which identifies the audience precisely. The manifesto needed Alid signatures — men of the Prophet's family, certifying that these men were not of the Prophet's family — because ordinary jurists could have called the

Fatimids heretics and it would have settled nothing. Establishing that a claimant is not descended from Ali is only worth the trouble in front of people who already hold that descent from Ali is decisive. And three years later the same government licensed the Ashura mourning in Baghdad.

That is what the landscape predicted. By the eleventh century the reverence for the Prophet's household was not a sectarian position that had to be argued; it was in the calendar, in the naming of children, in the shrines, and in the assumptions of a very large body of Muslims who were not Isma'ilis and never became any. Both caliphates were competing for that constituency, which is why both had to have the family, and why one of them spent a state occasion proving the other did not.

Three, and this is a correction: the finding that the robe faces the competitor rather than the conquered is confirmed here, but it needs a clause added, because this order addressed the conquered directly on its first day and the exception proves the rule rather than breaking it.

Jawhar's safe-conduct is addressed to the people of Egypt, by name, in answer to their own request, and it is the founding document of the state. That looks like a counter-example. It is not, because of what the document says. A robe asks the governed to believe something. The *amān* asked the Egyptians to believe nothing whatever: it guaranteed their existing law, their existing worship, their existing arrangements, and it was scrupulously kept. It is not a justifying story addressed to the conquered. It is a promise not to tell them one.

So the amended finding runs: **a conquering order addresses the conquered in the language of guarantee and addresses the competitor in the language of legitimacy, and where it seems to be making its case to its own subjects, examine whether the case actually asks anything of them.** Deference is not belief and can be extracted without any argument at all — a parasol, drums, and a requirement to put your face on the ground will do it, and cost nothing but money.

The bill for this arrives later and it is the subject of the modules that follow. An order that has told the world it is the sole authority on the meaning of the law, and has told the population under its own hand that the law will not change, has taken out a loan against a contradiction. As long as it is rich, the contradiction is affordable: the coin goes out, the processions go on, the missionaries are paid, and the Egyptian keeps his madhhab and bows in the street. The question the study now has to face is what such an order does about the children — and whether an order that will not ask its subjects for belief can ever obtain it.

A note on sources. The Fatimid coin legends are quoted in Arabic from the numismatic literature and the published catalogue descriptions of surviving specimens:

the three concentric circles of al-Mu'izz's Egyptian dinars of 358–359, with the *shahāda* innermost, the *waṣī* formula in the middle ring, Qur'an 9:33 outermost, and the ruler's name and titles on the reverse with mint and date. The coins are objects, dated and struck in quantity, and they are the strongest evidence in this module. The translations are mine, and the reading of *waṣī* as legatee or executor rather than the looser "successor" is a choice about which specialists differ in emphasis, though not about the substance.

One point in the numismatic literature is genuinely contested and is flagged rather than resolved. Some accounts state that the explicitly Shi'i middle-ring legend gave offence and was abandoned; others state that from 386/996 onward all Fatimid coins carried the formula attesting Ali's authority. These cannot both be right as stated, the module does not depend on either, and no continuity of the legend across the whole dynasty is asserted here. What is asserted is that the formula was on the first Egyptian issues of al-Mu'izz, which is not in dispute.

The al-Azhar dome inscription is quoted from Charles Schefer's French, in his 1881 edition of Nasir-i Khusraw, where he gives it as al-Maqrizi's copy. It is therefore at two removes — al-Maqrizi's fifteenth-century transcription of a tenth-century inscription, rendered into French in the nineteenth century — and the Arabic is not reproduced here. That is the weakest textual link in the module and the argument built on it (the phrase *servant of God and His deputy*, and the blessing on forebears and children) should be treated as resting on al-Maqrizi's report rather than on an inspected inscription. Schefer gives the foundation as 24 Jumada I 359 and the completion as 21 Ramadan 361, which he converts to 4 March 970 and 3 July 973; the second conversion appears to be a slip of one year, and the completion is given here as 972, following the standard accounts.

The Baghdad manifesto is quoted in Arabic from the medieval compilations that preserve it — Ibn al-Jawzi's *al-Muntaẓam*, al-Suyuti's *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, and al-Maqrizi's *Ittiʿāẓ* — whose versions agree closely on the passages quoted and differ in small details and in the presence or absence of certain clauses. The translations are mine. The document survives only through these compilers and no original is extant; its wording as we have it is a fourteenth- and fifteenth-century transmission of an eleventh-century text, and the possibility that it was sharpened in transmission cannot be excluded. The date is given as Rabi' al-Akhir 402, November 1011; some sources place the assembly in 400/1010 and the document in 402, and both years appear in the literature. The identification of the signatories, including al-Sharif al-Radi and al-Sharif al-Murtada, follows Ibn Khaldun's list; Shainool Jiwa's close study of the surviving versions and their signatories is paraphrased and credited, and readers who want the

manifesto examined properly should go there. Ibn Khaldun's assessment of the testimony as hearsay is paraphrased from the *Muqaddima*.

Qirwash ibn Muqallad's transfer of the *khuṭba* and coinage to al-Hakim in 1010, the parallel move by the chief of the Banu Asad, the Baghdad street slogans of 1008, and the permission given by Fakhr al-Mulk in 404 for the Karkh quarter to hold the Ashura mourning, are reported by the medieval compilers and are paraphrased from them here; they are hostile sources reporting events unfavourable to their own side, which is the circumstance in which such sources are worth most.

Everything from Nasir-i Khusraw — the procession, the mule and the plain bridle, the ten-thousand-dinar robe, the parasol-bearer, the prostration, and the mosaic inscription bearing the titles of the sultan of Egypt on the portico of the Haram al-Sharif at Jerusalem — is from Schefer's public-domain French translation of 1881 and is therefore at one remove from the Persian, as in the previous module. The valuation of the robe and of the parasol-bearer's costume at ten thousand dinars each is what the traveller was told and is not treated as a figure.

The al-Aqmar medallion, its Qur'anic frame from sura 33, and its formal resemblance to the concentric-ring design of the Fatimid dinar, follow the standard art-historical literature, principally Caroline Williams and Doris Behrens-Abouseif, paraphrased and credited. The mosque is dated by its own foundation inscription to 519/1125 and names the vizier al-Ma'mun al-Bata'ihi under the caliph al-Amir; it stands and can be looked at, which makes it, with the coins, the best-attested evidence here.

The account of Isma'ili Imamate doctrine, the *da'wa* hierarchy and its stations in Yemen, Sind, Persia, Iraq and Syria, is paraphrased from the modern scholarship, principally Farhad Daftary and Paul Walker, and credited. The claim in the text that there was no comparable apparatus directed at the Egyptian population is an argument from absence and is the module's most exposed assertion; it is the subject of the next module and is proved or abandoned there rather than here.

MODULE 4

The Boy Whose Board Was Broken

Formation — what was already installed in the Egyptian child, what the conquerors built instead, who it was built for, and why the most elaborate doctrinal apparatus in the medieval Islamic world left no trace in the country that paid for it.

What was already running

Somewhere in Fustat, in the eleventh century, a schoolmaster wrote a short note to a father. The paper survives, because it had Hebrew letters on it and Hebrew letters were not thrown away; it sat in a lumber room off a synagogue for eight hundred years and is now catalogued at Cambridge as T-S Ar.53.65. It is a few lines in Arabic written in the Hebrew alphabet, and it says that a boy called Abu'l-Hasan, since transferring to the writer's *kuttāb*, has applied himself with great zeal, and that his misfortune was that another boy broke his writing board in front of the other children.

There is nothing in it. A small boy, a wooden board, a broken board, a teacher covering himself with a parent. That is exactly why it is worth beginning with, because this is the machinery, and the machinery is almost never visible in the sources that historians normally read. Nobody wrote a chronicle about the *kuttāb*. It appears in the record only when a board gets broken and somebody has to explain.

Multiply that room. In Fatimid Egypt there were at least three complete systems for taking a child of four or five and giving him a world.

The Muslim one. The *kuttāb* — an elementary school, usually attached to a mosque, funded by the neighbourhood or by an endowment, in which small children learned the Arabic script and memorised the Qur'an by copying it onto boards. From there, for the few who went further, the study circles in the mosque: *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, the chains of transmission by which one knows whose word to take. The Egyptian Muslim schools were Sunni, mostly Shafi'i and Maliki, and had been running in Fustat since the century after the conquest. By 969 that apparatus was three hundred years old.

The Christian one. Baptism in infancy, which is an act performed on a person too young to consent and which enrols him permanently. Then the liturgy, the fasts — the Coptic fasting calendar is among the heaviest in Christendom and structures more than two hundred days of the year — the saints' days, the pilgrimages, the monasteries of Wadi Natrun and the Thebaid, and a hierarchy of bishops under a patriarch that reached into every village in Egypt. This apparatus was older than the Muslim one by

three centuries and had already survived one conquest by being captured rather than broken.

The Jewish one. Smaller and, thanks to the Geniza, the best documented society of the medieval world. Its own courts, its own communal officers, its own elementary schools of the kind the broken board came from, its own academies, and a network of correspondence and authority running to the academies of Palestine and Iraq.

Each of these is a machine for producing a particular kind of adult: one who knows, without having to think about it, who his people are, whose ruling he accepts on a question of law, which days of the year are not ordinary, and which men he does not check. None of them belonged to the Fatimids. All of them had been guaranteed, in writing, in July 969.

And each was itself the residue of an earlier conquest. The Coptic church was the naturalised remainder of the Christianisation of Egypt, laid over a pharaonic religion it had displaced so thoroughly that by the tenth century nobody in Egypt could read the older writing at all. It had been the persecuted confession under Byzantium, restored to its throne by Amr in 641, and taxed, branded and squeezed by the Umayyad governors afterwards. Its calendar counts its years from 284, the accession of Diocletian: the Era of the Martyrs. The Coptic church dates the world from a persecution — which is the landscape's finding again, in another confession, running for seven hundred years before a Fatimid soldier crossed the Nile.

The year an Egyptian lived in

Now the deepest layer, and the one that ought to settle any argument about which apparatus was actually in possession.

Egypt is farmed by the flood, and the flood is solar. The Muslim year is lunar and runs backwards through the seasons at eleven days a year, which makes it useless for telling a cultivator when to sow. So the year Egyptian agriculture ran on was the old Egyptian civil year — twelve months of thirty days and a short intercalary month, divided into the three pharaonic seasons of inundation, emergence and harvest — preserved, transmitted and kept in repair by the Coptic church as its liturgical calendar.

The Muslim administration of Egypt did not fight this. It adopted it. The tax year, the *sana kharājiyya*, ran on Coptic months with a year-number taken from the Islamic era, and because a solar count and a lunar count drift apart, the two year-numbers came steadily out of step; by the Fatimid period the gap had opened to four years and the documents simply record both.

And the Fatimid state gave the arrangement formal status. In 366 — 976 or 977, seven years after the conquest — under al-Aziz, the fiscal year was officially recognised

for administration and public business. The documentary record shows Coptic month-names in use by Muslims and Christians alike, in private letters and in official papers, throughout the dynasty. Egypt was still assessing its taxes on that calendar in the nineteenth century.

Hold the two facts together. The Imam of the age, sole authoritative interpreter of the revelation, sovereign over the meaning of the sacred, installed Ashura and Ghadir in Cairo as state festivals with processions and his own person on display. And his treasury reckoned the year in Thoth and Paophi and Hathor, by a calendar the Christians had inherited from the pharaohs and dated from a Roman persecution, because that was the year in which Egypt actually happened.

Nobody had to defend that calendar. Nobody noticed it was doing anything. It was simply when things were.

What the conquerors built

It has to be said plainly, because the argument of this module is easily mistaken for a sneer at an achievement, and the achievement was real and very large.

Jawhar founded al-Azhar with the city in 970. Al-Hakim founded the *Dār al-ʿIlm*, the House of Knowledge, in 1005, with a library that was among the greatest in the world; the subjects taught ran from Qur'an and *ḥadīth* to philosophy, medicine and astronomy; it was endowed, staffed, and open to the public, and it functioned until the dynasty fell. There were lectures on law after Friday prayers at al-Azhar, at the mosque in Fustat and later at al-Hakim's own mosque, and those were open to anyone who wanted to come. The state commissioned an astronomical table. It kept Ibn al-Haytham. It employed and paid a body of scholars, poets and jurists on a scale nobody in the Islamic world could match.

And it had, in al-Qadi al-Nu'man's *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, something no Shi'i power had ever possessed: a complete code of law, written by the state's own chief judge while the state was running, which could be taught, applied in courts and exported to missionaries abroad with instructions to decide by it.

This was not a regime that neglected learning. It was, by a distance, the best-funded intellectual establishment of its century.

And who it was for

Now look at the architecture of the teaching, because the architecture is the finding.

Fatimid doctrinal instruction ran in two tiers. The outer tier was the *ẓāhir* — law, practice, the things a state's courts need — and those sessions were public and anyone

could attend. The inner tier was the *ḥikma*, wisdom, the esoteric doctrine proper: the *ta'wīl*, the interpretation beneath the letter, the account of the Imam and the cosmos of which the outward law is the shell.

The sessions in which that was taught were called the *majālis al-ḥikma*, and every feature of how they were run points the same way.

They were held inside the Fatimid palace, in a hall set aside for the purpose. The texts read at them were written by or for the chief missionary and had to be approved by the Imam personally before delivery. And attendance was restricted to those who had taken the *mīthāq* — the oath of allegiance and of secrecy. Under al-Hakim the programme was elaborated into a set of parallel sessions for different categories: one for the great men and the learned, one for ordinary officials, one for the women of the palace, sessions for the general public, sessions for women of the public, and sessions for visitors to the country.

That last category is worth pausing on. There was a graded instructional programme, in the palace, with a session laid on for foreigners passing through Egypt. There was not a session laid on for the Egyptian village.

The rest of the apparatus points outward in the same way. The *da'wa* was an organisation for producing missionaries and sending them to Yemen, Sind, Persia, Iraq and Syria — places the Fatimid state did not govern. Many of the missionaries trained at the House of Knowledge; the great collections of *majālis* that survive, above all al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi's, are the teaching materials of that export operation. Ismailis living outside Fatimid territory kept the law of the land they lived in and brought their private disputes to the local missionary — which is to say the movement was designed from the start to make believers inside other men's states.

What is missing is the thing the *kuttāb* was. There is no Isma'ili elementary school for Egyptian children. There is no Isma'ili catechism given to five-year-olds, no infant rite of enrolment, no Isma'ili primary curriculum, no attempt to reach the child before he had already been given a world by somebody else. The instruction was for adults, and it began with an oath, and an oath can only be sworn by someone old enough to swear it.

By the time a man in Fustat was old enough to take the *mīthāq*, he had already spent fifteen years being told who his people were, whose word he took, and which days were holy — in a *kuttāb*, or a church, or a synagogue school, by people who were not the Imam's.

Why it could not have been otherwise

There is a temptation to read this as a failure of nerve or a lapse of policy, and to imagine a Fatimid caliph who might have done it differently. The temptation should be resisted, because two separate things made it impossible, and only one of them was a choice.

The first was the promise. Jawhar's safe-conduct had guaranteed the Egyptians their legal schools, their worship and their existing arrangements, and that guarantee was the instrument that had bought the country in five months without a battle at Fustat. It was kept for two centuries. But a guarantee of a population's law is a guarantee of its right to go on being taught that law by somebody else, and the *kuttāb* is where the law starts. Having promised not to disturb the schools, the dynasty could not take the schools.

The second was the doctrine itself, and this is the part that no policy could have altered.

Isma'ilism as the Fatimids held it was a graded system of knowledge. Its content was not a set of propositions anyone could be handed; it was an ascent, in stages, from the outward law to the inner meaning, released to a man as he was judged ready for it, under an oath of secrecy, by an authorised teacher, on texts the Imam had approved. That is not an incidental feature of the doctrine — it is the doctrine's shape. The whole claim rests on there being a truth beneath the surface which requires an authorised interpreter, and a truth available to everybody requires no interpreter and therefore dissolves the claim.

A body of knowledge with that architecture cannot be given to children. Not because children are unworthy, but because the two things are mechanically incompatible: a secret cannot be taught to five-year-olds in a village school and remain a secret, and a doctrine released in stages by examination cannot be installed wholesale before the age of reason. Mass formation and esotericism are alternatives. An order can have one.

So the withholding here has a different cause from the withholding a European colonial administration practised eight centuries later. There, the calculation was that forming the governed as members of the ruling nation would amount to admitting them, and admission would confer claims the ruler intended to refuse; a small administrative class was formed and the rest were left. That was a decision, and it could have gone the other way. In Cairo it could not have gone the other way, because the ruling doctrine's own architecture forbade the operation. The Fatimids did not decline to form the Egyptians. They were, by the structure of what they believed, unable to.

The consequence is the same either way, and it is the consequence that matters. There is no unformed person. A child not formed by the ruler's apparatus is not a blank waiting; he is being formed, on schedule, by whichever apparatus is in the room. In Egypt three of them were in the room, all of them older than the dynasty, all of them guaranteed by the dynasty's own founding document, and all of them running every day in every village for two hundred and two years.

The sessions closed

One further detail belongs here because it shows how insecure even the inner apparatus was.

The wisdom sessions were suspended in 400, reopened, suspended again in 401, and stopped a third time at the end of 405 — three interruptions inside a decade, at the height of the dynasty's power, under the caliph who had done more for Ismaili instruction than any of his predecessors. The reasons are not recoverable; the specialists connect the last closure with the Druze affair, when missionaries in Cairo began preaching the divinity of al-Hakim and split off a movement that survives in the Levant to this day.

Whatever the cause, an apparatus that can be switched off three times in ten years by a palace decision, and whose lecture texts require the ruler's personal approval before delivery, is not a formation system. It is a court seminar. Formation is not switched off, because it is not centrally administered: nobody could have suspended baptism in Egypt, and no decree could have stopped the *kuttāb*, because the *kuttāb* was a man, a room and some boards, repeated ten thousand times.

The test, and the control group

On the tenth of September 1171, Saladin had the Friday sermon in Cairo read in the name of the Abbasid caliph. The last Fatimid Imam lay dying in the palace a short distance away and did not know. Two hundred and sixty-two years of Isma'ili rule ended that morning.

Nothing happened. There was no rising, no defence, no crowd. The specialist who knows the Ismaili sources best describes the collapse as taking place amid the complete apathy of the Egyptian population. Two years later a conspiracy of former regime men attempted a restoration and had to invite the Crusaders to invade in order to draw Saladin away; it came to nothing and it was a conspiracy of officials, not a movement.

Then the doctrine vanished. Not diminished — vanished. Isma'ilism disappeared completely and irrevocably from Egypt, the one country where it had held state power,

commanded the treasury, owned the great mosque, run the House of Knowledge and appointed the judges for two centuries.

And here is the part that turns an observation into a test, because there is a control group and it is exact.

In the same years, the same doctrine, propagated by the same organisation, using the same teaching materials, established itself permanently in Persia, in Syria, in Yemen and in Gujarat — four places where it never had a state, never had a treasury, never had a mosque of its own, and was frequently hunted. Those communities are still there. The Tayyibi tradition of Yemen and India preserved the Fatimid literature itself, which is the reason anything of the Cairo library's contents can be read today. The doctrine survived its own downfall because of what had been built where it had no power, and it did not survive where it had all of it.

The variable that separates the two cases is not funding, prestige, doctrine, personnel or time. Egypt had more of every one. The variable is that outside the state the missionaries had to make households, and households make children, and there was nothing else to do. Inside the state there was a payroll, a palace hall, and a guarantee to everybody else that nothing would change. And when the payroll stopped, there was nothing.

Reading formation against the framework

Four things, and the first two are this study's central contribution.

One: withheld formation has at least two distinct causes, and the second one has not been named before. A ruler may withhold because forming the governed would admit them; or he may withhold because his own doctrine is structurally incapable of forming anyone in childhood. The outcome is identical and the mechanism is not.

The colonial version is a decision. Forming the subject population in the ruler's own frame would make them members, and membership carries claims, so a small administrative class is formed and the rest are left to whatever was there before. That calculation could have been made differently and occasionally was.

The Fatimid version is not a decision at all. A doctrine whose content is the graded release of secrets to sworn adults cannot be installed in five-year-olds without ceasing to be that doctrine. No caliph could have ordered it; the order would have been self-cancelling. And the significance of this is that it can happen to an order that wants the population, spends enormously on learning, and is not withholding anything out of contempt.

State the rule: **the more elaborate, prestigious and intellectually serious a ruling doctrine's apparatus, the more likely it is to be structurally incapable of forming a population — because sophistication in doctrine tends to mean graded access, and graded access is the opposite of formation.** Esotericism and mass formation are alternatives, and an order may have exactly one.

Two, the diagnostic that follows, and it is cheap to apply: look for the elementary school. Not the library, not the college, not the endowment, not the size of the scholarly payroll — the room where small children sit with boards. An order that has built the finest library in the world and no infant schools has not built a formation apparatus; it has built a seminary, and a seminary produces clerics, not a people.

Fatimid Cairo had the House of Knowledge, an astronomical table named after the caliph, Ibn al-Haytham, a body of law written by the chief judge, and a graded curriculum with a session laid on for foreign visitors. The Egyptian child learned his letters where he had learned them for three hundred years, in a room the dynasty had promised in writing not to touch.

Three: the control group makes this a test rather than an interpretation, and the result is counter-intuitive enough to be worth stating as a warning. A doctrine that captures a state may be worse off than one that does not, because the state substitutes for the work. Where the Fatimid mission had no power — Persia, Syria, Yemen, Gujarat — it had to build households, and households produce children who are formed, and those communities outlived the dynasty by eight and a half centuries. Where it had the treasury, the mosque, the courts and the palace, it built an institution instead, and the institution died with its funding.

The general form: **an apparatus that runs on a payroll is not formation, however grand, because formation is precisely the thing that keeps running when nobody is paying for it.** The test is not what an order spends. It is what survives the money stopping.

Four, compounding the landscape's finding and now completing it: the deepest layer of formation is the one nobody perceives as formation at all.

The Fatimids installed Ashura and Ghadir in Cairo with processions, endowments and the Imam in person, and both were gone within a generation of 1171, because a state festival is visible, is understood by everyone to be the government's, and can therefore be removed by a government. What could not be removed was the calendar underneath — the pharaonic year kept by the Coptic church, adopted by the Muslim tax office, given official status by the Fatimid state itself in 976, used by Muslims and Christians alike to know when to sow, and still in use in Egyptian villages a thousand

years later. Nobody installed it. Nobody defended it. No decree could have suspended it, because it was not anybody's policy; it was simply when things happened.

The landscape found that a grievance with a date in the year becomes heritable and outlives the circumstances that produced it. This module completes the pair from the other end: **the most durable formation is the part of a world-picture that is not experienced as a belief at all — the year, the alphabet, the rite performed on infants, the language of the market.** Beliefs can be argued with and observances can be banned. A sowing month cannot be argued with, because nobody is asserting it.

Which is the real answer to the question this study opened with. Egypt kept the most magnificent doctrinal establishment of its age for two hundred years and stayed Sunni and Coptic, and there is nothing mysterious in it. The dynasty had bought the country by promising not to touch the rooms where children were made, and its own doctrine could not have used those rooms if they had been offered. It formed the men it sent abroad and the men who came to it, and the men it formed abroad are still there. At home it built a spectacle, paid for it out of the richest revenue on earth, and required people to bow in the street. They bowed for two centuries, went home, and taught their sons something else.

A note on sources. The schoolmaster's letter is Cambridge University Library T-S Ar.53.65, a Judaeo-Arabic note published by S. D. Goitein in "Side Lights on Jewish Education from the Cairo Geniza" (1971) and now digitised in the Princeton Geniza project. The document is medieval and its content is described here rather than quoted, because the English rendering available to this study is Goitein's and is in copyright; the two Arabic words that carry the description, *kuttāb* for the school and *lawḥ* for the writing board, are the document's own. Its date is not fixed more closely than the Geniza's main period, and its use here is illustrative rather than evidential: it shows what a *kuttāb* was, not how many there were.

The account of the *majālis al-ḥikma* — their restriction to those who had taken the *mīthāq*, their location in a hall of the Fatimid palace, the requirement that texts be approved by the Imam before delivery, the elaboration under al-Hakim into parallel sessions for the great, for ordinary officials, for palace women, for the general public, for public women and for visitors to the country, the separate public sessions on Ismaili law open to all after Friday prayers at al-Azhar and elsewhere, and the suspensions in 400, 401 and at the end of 405 — is paraphrased from the modern scholarship, principally Heinz Halm's study of the Ismaili oath of allegiance and the sessions of wisdom, and Farhad Daftary, and is credited. This is the module's load-bearing evidence and it is entirely at second hand: no *majlis* register survives to this study, and

the reconstruction rests on the surviving lecture collections and on the compilers. A reader who wants to attack the argument should attack it there.

The foundation of the *Dār al-ʿIlm* in 395/1005, its library, its curriculum, its public access, its role in training missionaries, and its survival until 1171, are from the same literature and from al-Maqrizi, paraphrased. The *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* of al-Qadi al-Nu'man and al-Hakim's instruction to his missionary in Yemen to decide by it alone are likewise paraphrased and credited. That the Fatimid establishment was the best-funded intellectual enterprise of its century is an assessment, not a measurement, and is offered as such.

The Coptic calendar — the extension of the ancient Egyptian civil year, twelve thirty-day months and an intercalary month, the three pharaonic seasons, the era counted from 284 — and its continuous use by Egyptian farmers of both religions, are standard. The specific claims about the fiscal year are from the recent documentary scholarship on the *sana kharājiyya* in Fatimid Egypt: that it ran on Coptic months with an Islamic year-number, that it received official status in 366 under al-Aziz, that the drift between the solar fiscal count and the lunar hijri count had reached four years in the Fatimid period, and that Coptic month-names appear in the papyri and documents in the hands of Muslims as well as Christians. That work is paraphrased and credited. The claim that the calendar was load-bearing formation rather than mere administrative convenience is mine and is an interpretation, not a finding of the documentary scholarship.

The central negative claim of this module — that there was no Isma'ili elementary schooling for Egyptian children, no infant rite of enrolment and no primary curriculum — is an argument from absence, and it is the weakest link in the study so far. Absence of evidence in a period whose administrative archive was largely destroyed is not proof. What can be said positively is that every attested channel of Isma'ili instruction was adult, oath-gated or export-directed, that the specialist literature describes no such institution, and that the outcome is what the absence predicts. A single documented Isma'ili *kuttāb* in an Egyptian village would badly damage the argument, and the argument should be held with that in mind.

The end of the dynasty on 7 Muharram 567 / 10 September 1171, the absence of resistance, the failed restoration conspiracy of 1173–4 known only from sources friendly to Saladin, the complete disappearance of Ismailism from Egypt thereafter, and its permanent establishment in Persia, Syria, Yemen and Gujarat, follow Daftary and the standard accounts and are paraphrased. The characterisation of the collapse as meeting the population's apathy is the specialist literature's judgement, not this study's inference, and it is the judgement of a scholar writing from inside the Ismaili tradition

rather than against it, which is why it is relied on. The Tayyibi preservation of Fatimid literature in Yemen and India is the reason a great deal of what is cited across this study exists at all, and that debt is acknowledged here rather than in a footnote.

The description of the *kuttāb* — children entering at four to six, the Arabic script, memorisation of the Qur'an, neighbourhood or endowment funding, attachment to mosques — is standard and paraphrased. No figure for the number of such schools in Fatimid Egypt is known to this study and none is given. Literacy estimates for medieval Egypt circulate at under ten per cent of the population; they rest on very little and are not used here.

MODULE 5

A Net Across the Door

The cost column — what compliance cost the cultivator, the villager, the artisan and the merchant, what it bought them, what happened to those who would not, and whether any of them could leave.

The man at the threshing floor

Start with the bill, because everything else in this module is a judgement about whether it was worth paying.

The best surviving itemisation of what an Egyptian village owed comes from a fiscal survey of the Fayyum province compiled by an official named al-Nabulusi in the 1240s. That is a generation after the Fatimids, under the Ayyubids, and the difference matters and is stated again at the end of this module. But the system it describes was inherited rather than invented; the administrative manuals it draws on record Fatimid rates for comparison, and note where a rate had changed — the tax on colocasia, for instance, is given as four dinars a feddan, down from five under the Fatimids. What follows is therefore the shape of the burden rather than a Fatimid balance sheet, and it should be read that way.

The land tax on grain was usually not assessed plot by plot. A lump sum in *ardabbs* of wheat, barley and beans was fixed for the whole village on an estimate of its arable, and then levied collectively from the tenants. A per-plot survey every year was expensive; a village-level assessment was cheap; and the difference in cost was borne by the villagers, who had to divide the total among themselves.

On top of the grain assessment came the cash tax on field crops, at a scale per feddan by crop — a dinar for alfalfa, two for garlic and green vegetables, one and a half for cotton, three to five for flax — with a surcharge of one-eighth added to the basic rate. Orchards paid two dinars a feddan and vineyards over five, again with the surcharge.

And then came the fees, and the fees are where the texture is. There was a threshing-floor fee, in grain and in cash. There was a separate measurement fee, in grain, roughly equal to the threshing-floor fee, sub-divided by crop. There was a harvest fee of fifty-three dirhams, levied at that flat figure on nearly every grain village in the province regardless of what it produced. There was a dredging fee, about a dinar, from every village on a gravity-fed canal. There were small payments in grain to the Canal Controller, the official who decided when the weirs opened and shut. There was a hay

levy on the stalks left after harvest, divided between the treasury, the assignee and the cultivator, with the cultivator able to buy out the treasury's share for cash. There was a chicken levy: eighty-seven villages reared some fifty-five thousand birds from chicks hatched in two government hatcheries and delivered them grown, receiving as a rearing wage one-third of the number they owed — and rearing poultry outside that arrangement was not permitted.

And there was a protection fee, the *rasm al-khafāra*, of fifteen dirhams, collected from most villages at that uniform figure.

Fifteen dirhams is a trivial sum, and that is what makes it the most eloquent item on the list. It is not a charge for policing; it is too small and too flat to be a charge for anything. It is a line in a register recording that the relationship exists — that the village is on the books as a place the state protects, and pays a token for it every year. A modest and uniform fee is a receipt, and a receipt has to be issued to somebody.

The beast-chasers

The non-Muslim adult male paid all of that, if he farmed, and then paid the poll tax on top.

In the Fayyum register the term used is not the legal word *jizya* but *al-jawālī*, and the rate is flat: two dinars a year on every non-Muslim adult male. The majority of Sunni legal schools exempt the poor and those unable to pay. Fatimid and Ayyubid practice was generally to grant no exemption and to levy the flat rate on everyone.

The officials who collected it were called, in the register itself, *ṭarrādūn al-waḥsh* — the beast-chasers, the men who drive wild game. They were paid half a dinar a year each, deducted from the poll-tax revenue they brought in.

That is not a polemicist's phrase. It is the job title in the government's own ledger.

What the collection was actually like can be recovered, because the people paying it wrote to each other about it and their letters survive. A petition from the Jewish community of Alexandria to the head of Egyptian Jewry, written some time between 1140 and 1159, complains of three named officials — a certain Hasan ibn Karam ibn Iskandar, a treasury agent, and two others — who were issuing receipts for the poll tax without registering them in the supervising bureau, which meant the payment could be demanded a second time: once for the officials' own pockets and once for the treasury. Alongside the double payment the petition lists what came with it: the extortion of bribes, the assault on houses, the exposing of the head before the tax collectors, and the rape of women.

This is a document written by the payers, to their own community leader, for no audience beyond him. It is not evidence about the Fatimid regime's intentions; the

fraud it describes was fraud *against* the treasury as well as against the community. It is evidence about what the two dinars actually felt like at the point of collection, which is a different question and the one this module is asking.

Elsewhere in the Geniza, requests to have one's poll tax paid by somebody else, letters about beatings by tax collectors, and — by the twelfth century — a standing line in the community's charity budget for paying the tax of the poor. Nobody in these documents is discussing whether the arrangement is legitimate. They are discussing how to find two dinars.

What it bought

Now the other column, and it has to be given at full weight, because it was not small and because the best witness to it was an eyewitness who wrote down what he saw and said explicitly that he would not vouch for what he had merely been told.

Nasir-i Khusraw devoted a short chapter of his travel account to the character and manner of governing of the ruler of Egypt. It opens like this:

> *"La sécurité et le calme sont si grands à Misr que les merciers, les changeurs et les bijoutiers ne ferment pas les portes de leurs boutiques. Ils se contentent d'étendre devant elles un filet et personne n'a l'audace de dérober quoi que ce soit."*
> *"Security and calm are so great in Misr that the mercers, the money-changers and the jewellers do not shut the doors of their shops. They content themselves with stretching a net across the front, and nobody dares to steal anything."*

A money-changer's shop, in a city of several hundred thousand people, containing gold, closed at night with a net. Whatever else is true about this regime, that is what a traveller from Khurasan found remarkable enough to open a chapter with.

And it goes on. In the same passage:

> *"Dans toutes les villes et dans tous les villages, depuis la Syrie jusqu'au Qaïrouan où je suis allé, des intendants nommés par le sultan payent les dépenses des mosquées pour l'huile, les nattes fines et grossières, les tapis de prières, les salaires et les gages des sacristains, des gens chargés de l'entretien des tapis, des mouëzzins et autres employés."*
> *"In every town and every village, from Syria to Qayrawan, where I have been, stewards appointed by the sultan pay the expenses of the mosques — for oil, for fine and coarse matting, for prayer rugs, and the salaries and wages of the sacristans, of the men who look after the carpets, of the muezzins and the other employees."*

Set that beside the safe-conduct of 969, which had promised that the mosques would be maintained and those who served them paid. Seventy-eight years later a traveller crossing the whole width of the empire found the promise being kept in every town and village he passed through, out of the treasury, by salaried officials. The mosques in question were Sunni.

The rest of the benefit column is real and can be listed without inflation. The coinage was the most reliable gold in the world, which mattered to anyone who saved or traded. The courts sat: the chief judge held his tribunal in the old mosque of Amr twice a week, and the mosque's courtyard held, at any hour, five thousand people — students, foreigners, and public scribes drawing up bills of exchange and contracts. The canal system was maintained, which is the difference between a harvest and none. The palace distributed snow to the sick on request, and syrups and medicines and balm-oil to those who asked, and Nasir-i Khusraw records that these were never refused. The soldiers did not prey on the taxpayer, because they were paid in cash from the centre and had no claim on anybody. And the protected communities were left with their own courts, their own schools, their own calendars and their own heads, on terms better than they held anywhere in Christendom.

None of that is nothing. A Coptic villager paying two dinars he could barely raise was buying, among other things, the right to remain a Coptic villager, in a Coptic village, under a Coptic bishop, in a country where nobody was going to require him to be anything else.

The jeweller on the terrace

And then, in the same chapter, immediately after the sentence about the shops and the net, Nasir-i Khusraw tells the following story, without any sense that it sits oddly with what he has just written.

There was a Jewish jeweller who had the ear of the sovereign, extremely rich, entirely trusted in the purchase of precious stones. His name was Abu Sa'id. On the roof of his house, it was said, stood three hundred silver vessels each with a tree planted in it, all of them in fruit, so that the terrace looked like a garden.

One day the sultan's soldiers fell upon him and killed him.

Having done it, they were afraid. Twenty thousand of them mounted, assembled on the parade ground, and rode out onto the plain, which terrified the population of the capital. They stayed in the saddle until midday. Then a eunuch came out of the palace, stood in the gateway, and called to them: *the sultan asks whether you obey him, yes or no?* They answered with one voice: *we are submissive slaves, but we have committed a crime.* The eunuch said: *the sultan orders you to withdraw.* And they went.

That is the whole of it. Nobody was punished.

Then the dead man's brother, in fear, wrote to the sultan offering to pay two hundred thousand Maghribi dinars into the treasury at once. The sultan sent the letter back, had it torn up in public, and returned this message:

> *«Soyez sans inquiétude et retournez chez vous, car personne n'a rien à démêler avec vous, et moi je n'ai besoin de l'argent de qui que ce soit.»*
> *"Be easy in your mind and go home, for nobody has any business with you, and I have no need of anybody's money."*

And he issued letters of safe-conduct to the brother and to the son.

Read the two halves of that story together, because between them they are the ordinary man's ledger under this regime, stated more precisely than any analysis could state it.

The property was guaranteed absolutely. The offer of two hundred thousand dinars was the standard medieval expectation — that when a rich official dies, the state takes the estate — and the caliph refused it, publicly, theatrically, with the letter torn up in front of witnesses, and put the guarantee in writing. That is the same instrument as the safe-conduct of 969 and it was worth exactly as much.

The life was not guaranteed at all. Twenty thousand soldiers murdered the caliph's own financier in his own capital, admitted it in the street — *we are submissive slaves, but we have committed a crime* — and were told to go home.

And the reason is not caprice. It is arithmetic, and it can be read straight off the position. The state could enforce against a merchant, a villager, a bureau official, a Coptic bishop: it had collectors, courts, registers and prisons that reached all of them. It could not enforce against its own army, because the army was the enforcement. So it issued the guarantees it was able to keep and did not issue the one it was not.

Nasir-i Khusraw put both stories in the same chapter, as illustrations of good government, and did not notice the seam. He was not being obtuse. From where he stood, in 1048, both facts *were* facts about a well-run state — a state whose word to a subject about his property was good, in a century when almost nobody's was.

Could he leave?

The framework's question about any arrangement is whether the people inside it could get out, because a cost that cannot be escaped is priced differently from one that can. This case gives four different answers depending on who is asking, and the fiscal record itself supplies one of them.

The cultivator could not leave the country. Egypt is a ribbon in a desert. There is no frontier a man on foot with a family can reach, no forest, no hill country, no next valley. And what he would be leaving is not merely a government but the only water there is.

But he could leave the district, and the register counts him. In the Fayyum poll-tax register, a quarter of the province's registered non-Muslims are entered as absentees — not abroad, but in Upper or Lower Egypt. One in four had gone somewhere else in Egypt and was still on the books of the place he had left.

That figure is worth more than a great deal of narrative, because it is the state's own count of the people who had walked away from it, and it establishes that flight was not a theoretical option or a desperate last resort but a routine feature of the system, common enough to need its own column. A man could not escape Egypt. He could very often escape the collector, by being somewhere else when he came.

The merchant could leave, and did. The Geniza correspondence is the record of a commercial world running from al-Andalus and Sicily through Ifriqiya and Egypt to Aden and the Malabar coast, in which men moved for years at a time, held property in two countries, and made decisions about where to keep their families on grounds that included how they were being treated. For that class the Fatimid arrangement was competitive, and they said so with their feet: they came. The security of the shops, the reliability of the dinar, the courts that would enforce a contract, and the fact that a Jew or a Christian could rise in the bureaux — these were things the alternatives did not all offer.

And there was one exit that cost nothing and was always open: conversion. A non-Muslim who became a Muslim stopped paying the poll tax that day. That is a standing offer of two dinars a year, forever, made to every non-Muslim head of household in the country, by a state that never compelled anyone.

Which is why the most interesting counter-move in this module was made not by the state but against it, by the communities themselves — and it is the subject of the next section.

The slave could not leave at all, and there were a great many. The army was substantially purchased; the palace establishment was purchased; the alms-tax schedules of the following century treat slaves as taxable capital alongside coin. The men who could least leave were the men holding the weapons, which is a fact this study will have to come back to.

The neighbours

Two mechanisms in this system did the state's collecting for it without the state paying anybody, and they worked from opposite directions.

The first is the collective assessment. A village charged a lump sum in grain, and left to divide it among its own tenants, is a village in which the man who does not pay is not defying the treasury. He is stealing from the men he lives among, who will make up his share. That converts a distant and occasional enforcer into a permanent and local one, at no cost, and it explains a great deal about why medieval fiscal systems that look under-policed were not.

The second runs the other way and is subtler. From the eleventh century the Jewish community of Fustat was raising money to pay the poll tax of its own poor, and by the twelfth this had become a standing line in the communal welfare budget rather than an emergency appeal.

Consider what that institution is actually doing. It relieves genuine suffering; that is why it was done and it should be credited. But it also closes the one costless exit. A poor man who cannot find two dinars has, in front of him, a door marked *conversion* which will remove the charge permanently. A community that pays his two dinars has shut that door and kept him. The state's tax, in other words, was being used by the minority's own leadership as a retention device — the outside pressure converted into internal obligation, the annual reminder that it is the community which keeps you out of the beast-chasers' hands.

Both mechanisms are the same discovery from the two ends. **Social pressure is the cheapest enforcement in existence, and both a state and a community will reach for it, and each one's use of it strengthens the other's.** The Fatimid treasury got its grain collected by making neighbours liable for each other. The Jewish community held its membership by making itself the thing that stood between a poor man and the tax. Neither arrangement required a soldier.

When the ledger broke

Between roughly 1065 and 1072 — the dating varies in the sources and the modern literature, and the name by which the episode is known appears to be a coinage of a compiler writing nearly four centuries later — the Nile failed repeatedly, and Egypt endured what is generally taken to be the worst subsistence crisis in its recorded history. In one modern count, eleven of the twenty years between 1052 and 1072 saw an inadequate flood. Prices went beyond reach. Cities in the old capital area were depopulated. A merchant writing from Alexandria to his son in Fustat described a city

in which a man who left its gate either wished for death or was eaten, and a man who stayed died of hunger. The compilers report cannibalism, and the eating of dogs until there were no dogs.

Both columns of the ledger emptied at once. The benefit side went first — no grain, no security, and by the end the palace itself was stripped, the library dispersed and the caliph reportedly destitute. The cost side became unpayable at the same moment.

And here is the fact that this module exists to put on the record. **The population did not rise.**

What happened instead is that the Turkish regiments and the black African regiments fought each other, wrecked Cairo between them, plundered the palaces, and reduced the government to a name — until a general was fetched from Acre in 1073 with his own troops and a free hand. The men whose ledger had gone completely negative, who were burying children and eating dogs, did not move. The men whose monthly salaries had stopped arriving did.

Reading the cost column against the framework

Four things.

One, the contribution: a regime's guarantees map its enforcement reach, not its intentions, and the way to read that map is to list what it promises and then notice what it conspicuously does not.

The Fatimid state guaranteed property with unusual seriousness. It refused two hundred thousand dinars publicly and tore up the offer; it issued written safe-conducts; it bought the mosques of Ibn Tulun and of Amr from the founders' descendants for thirty thousand and a hundred thousand dinars rather than simply taking them, and called the population of Fustat to witness the purchase. Those are the acts of a regime that had decided property was a thing it would stand behind.

It did not guarantee the person. Twenty thousand soldiers killed the caliph's financier, said so, and were dismissed with a question.

The two are not a contradiction and they are not hypocrisy. They are a precise readout of who the state could reach. Its collectors, courts and registers reached every civilian in Egypt; nothing reached its own army. So it made the promise it could keep and withheld the one it could not, and an intelligent eyewitness recorded both as evidence of good government without seeing a seam, because from where he stood there was none.

State the rule: **read a regime's guarantees as a survey of its enforcement, and read the guarantee it does not give as the place where its writ stops.** The corollary is a warning about the whole class of evidence: charters, safe-conducts and privileges are

usually read as statements of intent or ideology, and they are better read as an inventory of what the issuer believes he can actually deliver. Anything he could deliver and chose not to would have been cheap to grant.

Two: exit is not binary, and it must be measured at the level the enforcer operates at. The framework has treated the ability to leave as the variable that prices compliance, and this case shows the variable is more granular than a border. An Egyptian cultivator could not leave Egypt; the desert saw to that, and the desert is why the conquest of 969 did not require anybody's consent. But one in four registered non-Muslims in the Fayyum had left the district, and the state's own tax register is what tells us so.

So: **ask not whether a subject can leave the polity, but whether he can leave the jurisdiction of the man who is actually taxing him** — the village, the district, the collector's round. A state that has made the country inescapable has usually not made the collector inescapable, and the difference between the two is where the compliance actually gets priced.

Three: social pressure is the cheapest enforcement there is, and a state and a community will each reach for it against the other in ways that reinforce rather than cancel. Collective village assessment made neighbours into bailiffs at no cost to the treasury. The Jewish community's poor-relief fund for the poll tax made the community into the thing standing between a man and the beast-chasers, and in doing so closed the one exit — conversion — that the fiscal pressure would otherwise have driven him through.

The general form is worth holding: **an external pressure applied to a bounded community does not simply weaken it; it is routinely converted by that community's own leadership into an instrument of cohesion, and the conversion is invisible in the state's records because it happens in the community's.** This is why the fiscal pressure on Egyptian Jews and Christians produced, over centuries, a slow attrition rather than a collapse — and it is one reason the confessional map of Egypt moved as slowly as the previous module found it did.

Four, compounding what the collection already holds about who overturns orders: the great famine is as close to a controlled experiment as this subject offers, and it comes out the way the framework says.

Take a population whose cost column is unbearable and whose benefit column has gone to nothing — no grain, no safety, no functioning courts, the palace itself looted — sustained for seven years, with the compilers reporting cannibalism. If suffering produced structural change, it would have produced it here. It did not. The peasantry and the urban poor of Egypt died in very large numbers and overturned nothing.

What changed the structure was two salaried army corps fighting each other over a payroll that had stopped, followed by an outside commander invited in with his own troops. The distance between those two facts is the whole of the finding. **A ledger going negative for the governed produces suffering, migration, flight and death. It does not produce structural change. Structural change came, here as elsewhere, from the men who were armed and had stopped being paid** — which is to say from precisely the group the settlement of 969 had made wholly dependent on the treasury, and from nobody else.

A note on sources. The itemised tax and fee schedule — the collective grain assessment by village, the per-feddan cash rates on field crops with the one-eighth surcharge, the rates on orchards and vineyards, the threshing-floor and measurement fees, the flat harvest fee of fifty-three dirhams, the dredging fee, the payments to the Canal Controller, the hay levy, the chicken levy and its rearing wage, the uniform protection fee of fifteen dirhams, the flat two-dinar poll tax under the term *al-jawālī*, the absence of exemption for the poor, and the poll-tax collectors called *ṭarrādūn al-waḥsh* — is drawn from the published database of al-Nabulusi's survey of the villages of the Fayyum, with its accompanying commentary drawing on Ibn Mammati, al-Makhzumi, al-Nuwayri, al-Qalqashandi and the modern work of Claude Cahen, Hassanein Rabie and Richard Cooper. It is paraphrased and credited.

That survey is the module's weakest load-bearing source and the weakness must be stated plainly rather than managed. It was compiled in the 1240s, in one province, under the Ayyubids, some seventy years after the Fatimids fell. The alms-tax it records was reintroduced to Egypt by Saladin and was not a Fatimid charge at all. The assignment-holders it mentions belong to a system the Fatimids did not use for their army. What justifies using it here is that the assessment machinery, the fee structure and the poll-tax practice were continuous — the manuals it rests on cite Fatimid rates where they differed, which both establishes the continuity and identifies the discontinuities — and what it is used for is the shape and granularity of the burden rather than any Fatimid figure. A reader who declines the extrapolation should discount the numbers in the first two sections and keep the rest, which does not depend on them.

The Alexandria poll-tax petition is Cambridge University Library T-S 13J33.9, addressed to the Nagid Shemuel b. Hananya and therefore datable between 1140 and 1159. It is described here from the catalogue entry of the Princeton Geniza Project, which draws on the Cambridge description and on Goitein's notes; this study has not read the manuscript and no full transcription was available to it. The three officials, the unregistered receipts, the resulting double payment, and the listed abuses are as that

entry reports them. The abuses are the petitioners' allegations, made in a document seeking intervention, and should be read as allegations.

Everything from Nasir-i Khusraw — the shops closed with a net, the mosque stewards from Syria to Qayrawan, the chief judge's tribunal in the mosque of Amr and the five thousand in its courtyard, the snow and medicines given on request, the murder of Abu Sa'id, the twenty thousand horsemen, the eunuch at the gate and the exchange with them, the torn letter and the safe-conducts, and al-Hakim's purchase of the mosques of Ibn Tulun and of Amr — is from Charles Schefer's public-domain French edition of 1881 and is therefore at one remove from the Persian, as throughout this study. Schefer's identification of Abu Sa'id as Abu Sa'id Sahl ibn Harun, a Jewish merchant of Tustar who had sold to a previous caliph the slave who became al-Mustansir's mother, and who was killed by Turkish soldiers at the instigation of a rival he had himself promoted to the vizierate, is his footnote drawing on the compilers, not the traveller's text, and is given here as such. The traveller's own figure of twenty thousand horsemen is a spectator's estimate and is not relied on for anything except that the number was large enough to frighten a city.

The famine is dated variously in the sources and the modern literature — 1062 to 1073, 1064 to 1071, 1065 to 1072, 1066 to 1072 — and is given here as roughly 1065 to 1072 with the disagreement on the page. The name by which it is generally known appears to be al-Maqrizi's coinage, and al-Maqrizi wrote in the fifteenth century; the most lurid details of the narrative, including the cannibalism, come from him and from compilers at a similar distance, and are reported here as their reports rather than as established. The count of eleven inadequate floods in the twenty years from 1052 is from the modern climatological and documentary scholarship and is paraphrased. The merchant's letter from Alexandria is paraphrased from a modern translation of a Geniza letter of Isma'il b. Farah to his son; the translation is in copyright and the shelfmark was not available to this study, which is a real gap in a passage doing rhetorical work. No death figure is given: the round numbers in circulation rest on nothing, and the claim that a third of the population died is not supportable.

The Geniza evidence on the poll tax generally — requests for others to pay it, reports of beatings by collectors, the absence of exemption for the poor in Fatimid and Ayyubid practice against the majority position of the Sunni schools, and the emergence of communal payment for the poor as a budget line by the twelfth century — is paraphrased from Goitein, Mark Cohen, Marina Rustow and Eli Alshech, and credited. The interpretation offered here of communal payment as a device that closes the exit of conversion is this study's, not theirs, and is an inference from the institution's effect rather than a claim about anyone's intention.

MODULE 6

Three Hundred and Sixty a Year

Extraction — where the money actually came from, what was taken that was not money, who could have refused and who could not, and what the surviving record is structurally unable to show.

What the river gave

The largest single item was the land tax, and its size is knowable only within a range.

Two figures circulate for the Egyptian *kharāj*. Abu Salih the Armenian, a Christian writing in the early thirteenth century, gives a total for the days of al-Mustansir; al-Maqrizi, working two centuries later still, gives three million one hundred thousand dinars on the basis of a survey conducted under the vizier al-Afdal around the turn of the twelfth century. Modern scholarship draws from these a working range of roughly two and three-quarter to three and a half million gold dinars a year.

That range should be held loosely for the usual reason — both compilers are downstream, and a survey figure is a claim about what was assessed rather than what was gathered — but also for a reason peculiar to Egypt: in this country the number genuinely moved. The assessment followed the flood, the flood was measured at one point on one island, and in the twenty years from 1052 something like eleven of them produced an inadequate rise. A revenue that is a function of rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands is not an annual figure at all. It is a distribution, and the state that lived on it was making a bet every summer.

Below the total, the mechanism has already been described: an assessment handed down for a district and apportioned among its taxpayers, a scale of rates per feddan by crop, a fee attached to every stage of harvesting, measuring, threshing and moving the grain, and a flat two dinars on every non-Muslim adult male. Under the Ayyubid administration a century later the poll tax alone brought in something in the order of a hundred and thirty thousand dinars a year — a useful indication of scale, though from a different regime.

What the desert gave

The most reliable evidence in this module is not in any chronicle. It is in the ground, about a hundred and eighty kilometres east and south of Aswan, in a system of dry valleys running toward the Red Sea hills.

Wadi Allaqi had been a gold district since the Middle Kingdom, worked out under the Ramessides, abandoned for the better part of a millennium, and reopened under Muslim rule. The archaeological survey of the Egyptian and Nubian gold fields places the peak of the early Arab working from the tenth to the eleventh centuries — precisely the Fatimid span — with activity in the north-east Sudan continuing to about 1350.

What survives is the plant. Large fortified settlements, extensive workings in the secondary deposits along the wadi floors, and inclined washing tables surrounded by their tailings — the tables on which crushed quartz was sluiced so the heavy gold would settle out. Grinding was done with the rotary quern, a fixed lower stone and a turning upper disc with a handle, which produced a finer powder than the earlier saddle mills and therefore released more metal from the same rock. Two forts stand at Derahib. The pottery from the sites shows several different populations present.

Gold and emeralds were extracted there, between roughly the ninth and thirteenth centuries, by chattel slaves.

Hold that against the object described in the third module. The Fatimid dinar was the most trusted coin in the Mediterranean world; its purity was what made merchants take it without assay from Córdoba to the Malabar coast; and its three concentric rings carried the dynasty's claim to be the sole authority on the meaning of the revelation into every market it reached. Part of the metal in those rings came out of the Nubian desert, ground on a rotary quern and washed on an inclined table by men who were somebody's property.

The excellence and the coercion are not two facts about this state that have to be weighed against each other. They are one fact, seen from the two ends of the same operation.

Three hundred and sixty a year

In 652 an Arab army under Abd Allah ibn Sa'd came down the Nile against the Christian kingdom of Makuria, failed at Dongola, and made terms instead. The agreement is called the *baqt*, from the Greek *pakton*; the word is used of no other treaty in Arabic, which is itself an indication of how odd contemporaries found it. It made Nubia neither conquered territory nor enemy territory but something with no other name, and it held for something like six centuries.

Its terms as the later compilers report them: free passage and protection for travellers in both directions, the return of fugitives, a supply from Egypt of wheat, barley, wine, horses and cloth — and, from Nubia, three hundred and sixty slaves a year.

No original document survives. The text reaches us through Ibn Abd al-Hakam in the ninth century and al-Maqrizi in the fifteenth and others between, and the number is suspiciously calendrical — one for each day of a three-hundred-and-sixty-day year — which is the kind of figure that gets tidied in transmission. The rate was renegotiated more than once and at some later point reduced to a delivery every three years. Nubian kings travelled to Baghdad to argue about it. Egyptian governors wrote to Dongola complaining that the slaves were not arriving, that runaways were being sheltered, and that Egyptian fugitives were being protected — which incidentally confirms the previous module's finding about exit, from the other side of a frontier.

Whatever the exact number, the structural fact is not in doubt and it is the reason this module is named after it. For six hundred years, one of the standing revenues of whoever governed Egypt was an annual delivery of human beings, arriving by treaty rather than by raid, from a Christian kingdom that was not at war with Egypt and was not going to be conquered by it. The Nubians largely obtained them by raiding further south rather than from their own population, which distributes the coercion outward without reducing it.

And the destination of that supply is not a mystery. The muster list a traveller wrote down in Cairo in 1047 contains a corps of thirty thousand *'abīd al-shirā'*, the slaves bought for money; a corps of thirty thousand *ustādh*, black and white slaves purchased for various services; and thirty thousand Zanj. The numbers are worthless and the categories are not. The army that held Egypt, the establishment that staffed the palace, and the labour that dug the gold were all supplied, in significant part, by the same trade — and one branch of that trade ran on a treaty older than Islam's second century.

The sea they moved

The most consequential thing the Fatimids extracted, they extracted by relocating a trade route, and the evidence for it is ceramic.

Before the tenth century the goods of the Indian Ocean reached the Mediterranean mainly through the Persian Gulf and up through Iraq — which is to say through Abbasid territory, into Abbasid customs houses, past Basra and Baghdad. Egypt received Chinese porcelain, Indian stones and South-East Asian spices, but received them at second hand, having paid somebody else's margin.

From the eleventh century that changes. Chinese ceramics begin appearing across Egypt, arriving through the Red Sea; the Egyptian ports of Aydhab and Quseir revive,

with Qus as the Nile terminus of the desert crossing; Aden becomes the gate through which the whole western Indian Ocean passes, and no ship from India is permitted beyond it. The earliest Geniza document concerning the India trade is from 1097; within a century that correspondence describes a commercial world running continuously from al-Andalus to the Malabar coast with Fustat at its hinge.

Several things caused the shift and the Fatimids caused only some of them: instability and piracy in the Gulf did a great deal of the work, and the decline of Abbasid Iraq did more. But the Fatimids took Aydhab in the tenth century, held Aden's hinterland through allies, and in 1058 — the year of the Baghdad adventure — the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan began going by the Aydhab route rather than through Syria, for fear of Seljuk reprisals. Pilgrims and cargo went along the same corridor, and both paid.

What that gave the treasury was the best revenue a medieval state could have: a levy on goods moving between two places, neither of them its own, paid by merchants who were mostly foreigners, on a route with no practical alternative. Nobody who paid it was a subject, and nobody who paid it could withhold it without abandoning the trade.

What the cloth gave, and what the caravan gave

Two more streams, briefly, because they are well established and this module has a different point to make.

Egypt's great cash crop was flax. It was grown across the Delta and the valley, taxed in cash at three to five dinars a feddan, spun and woven in Egypt and shipped in enormous quantity to Ifriqiya and Sicily to be worked further; the Geniza merchants' letters are so full of it that flax is effectively the currency of their correspondence. Alongside it ran the state textile workshops, whose inscribed cloths — *ṭirāz*, woven with the caliph's name and titles — were both a manufacture and, like the coinage, a way of putting the claim on an object other people wanted.

And at the far western end, the caravan terminus. Sijilmasa's revenue to the Fatimid treasury in the 920s and early 930s is reported at around four hundred thousand dinars a year, said to be about half of what the whole Maghrib produced; the figure reaches us at second hand and cannot be checked, and the module in which it first appeared flagged it as unverifiable. What can be checked is metallurgical and numismatic: the periods in which Córdoba and the Fatimids each struck gold correspond to the periods in which each held the terminus, and Jawhar's expedition of 958 put Fatimid dies into the Sijilmasa mint eleven years before he crossed the Nile.

Where it went

Down one channel, mostly.

The army was paid in cash, monthly, from the central treasury, out of a bureau whose name joined the two words — the department of the armies and salaries. That was the largest single call on the revenue and it never stopped being so.

After it came the court. The palace establishment was put at thirty thousand persons with twelve thousand servants on wages. The caliph's private domain included three hundred and sixty villages along the canal. The heirs of a dozen foreign dynasties were kept in Cairo on pensions of five hundred to two thousand dinars, with no duty but to salute the vizier. The mission was funded — its missionaries, its stations from Yemen to Sind, its House of Knowledge and its library. The mosques of every town from Syria to Qayrawan had their oil, matting, carpets and staff paid for by salaried stewards. And there were the two annual banquets, the processions, the ten thousand gilded saddles, and fifty thousand *men* of sugar assigned to the decoration of one table.

One correction to an earlier module belongs here rather than in a footnote. That module argued that the Fatimids did not maintain their army by revenue assignment, and it flagged the argument as its most exposed claim. Assignments plainly existed: in the year 390, which is 1000, the caliph's sister Sitt al-Mulk held assignments yielding some hundred thousand dinars a year, comprising estates in Upper and Lower Egypt, houses, orchards and a share of customs revenue, and other women of the family held similar grants. So the instrument was in use, for royal and courtly income, from early in the Egyptian period. What that module claimed, and what still stands, is narrower: that the fighting men were not maintained on it, and that an eyewitness in 1047 states flatly that no soldier held an assignment on any taxpayer. The distinction matters and the earlier module should have drawn it.

The liquidation

When the floods failed and the payroll could not be met, the state did what a state with a treasury and no credit does. It sold the treasury.

The reports of what happened in Cairo in the late 1060s come from the compilers and carry their usual problems, but the shape is consistent across them and the shape is what matters. In a fortnight of the year 460 — 1068 — goods were disposed of to raise pay for the Turkish regiments. Emeralds said to be worth three hundred thousand dinars went to one Turkish commander for five hundred. The library, which had been open to the public and was among the reasons foreigners came to Cairo at all, was dispersed: books torn up, thrown out, used to light fires.

The headline figure attached to that fortnight in the compilers — thirty million dinars' worth of goods — is not a number, it is an expression of magnitude, and it is not used here. The emeralds are worth more than the total, because the ratio is the information. Three hundred thousand dinars of stones changing hands for five hundred is not a sale; it is what a forced liquidation looks like when the buyer knows the seller cannot wait and is himself the reason the seller cannot wait. The men being paid off were the men doing the taking.

An order that had drawn on the Nile, the desert mines, a six-century treaty, the Indian Ocean transit, the flax of the Delta and the gold of the Sahara found that none of it could be converted into a month's wages fast enough, and burned its library for the difference.

What the record cannot show

One methodological point has to be made here rather than in the source note, because it applies to the whole of this study and this is the module where it bites hardest.

The Cairo Geniza is the finest documentary archive surviving from any medieval society, and this study leans on it heavily and gratefully. It is also the discarded papers of one religious community, in one city, with a strong bias toward the literate and the commercially active, and above all toward men who wrote letters because they were far from home.

The consequence is that the India trade in Fatimid Egypt looks the way it looks partly because the India traders are the people whose correspondence happens to survive. Specialists in the Red Sea have made exactly this warning: the prominence of the India trade and the maritime pilgrimage in modern accounts of these ports owes something to the normative position the Geniza has come to occupy in the field. The flax trade is vivid for the same reason. The grain the state actually lived on, the labour in the mines, the peasants' year, the internal Egyptian market and the Coptic majority are all comparatively silent, not because they were smaller but because nobody involved in them was writing letters to a business partner in Aden.

Which is why this module has leaned where it has: on the washing tables and tailings in Wadi Allaqi, on the mint distribution and the coin dies, on the gauge on Rawda island, on the ceramics found in Egyptian ground. Those were not composed. Nobody made a tailings heap in order to be read.

Reading extraction against the framework

Three things.

One, the contribution: what determines whether an extractive order develops institutions that share power is not how much it takes, but how many of its revenue sources could refuse.

Set out the Fatimid streams and ask, of each, what would happen if the payer declined.

The Egyptian cultivator could not refuse: the desert made flight from the country impossible, the register recorded him, and his neighbours were liable for his share. The slave in the Allaqi workings could not refuse in any sense of the word. Nubia's obligation ran on a treaty backed by six centuries of practice and the fact that Egypt lay downstream of nothing and upstream of everything Nubia needed. The Indian Ocean merchant could refuse only by giving up the route, and there was no other route. The Sijilmasa caravan paid whoever held the terminus, which was a military question. The flax grower was a cultivator again.

Not one of those parties could withhold. And so at no point in two hundred and sixty-two years did the Fatimid state need to ask anybody for money, and at no point did it develop any institution for asking — no assembly, no estate, no negotiated grant, no body whose consent to a levy was required or even conventionally sought. Its fiscal history contains no bargain because it contained no counterparty.

State the rule for testing elsewhere: **count a state's revenue streams and ask of each whether the payer could plausibly decline. The number that could is the pressure toward power-sharing institutions; the amount collected is nearly irrelevant to it.** And the corollary identifies the least institution-forming revenue there is: **income from transit tolls, from mines, and from people who are themselves property, because none of the three requires anyone's consent and none of the three can organise a refusal.** A state funded that way can be enormously rich and remain, constitutionally, a household.

Two, compounding what the last two modules established: the finest artefact this order produced and the harshest thing it did were the same operation, and the reader should refuse to net them.

The dinar was the best coin in the world. Its purity was not decoration; it was why the coin was accepted unassayed, why it carried the dynasty's claim into rival territory, and why merchants from four religions and a dozen countries came to Fustat. Part of the gold in it was dug and washed by slaves in the Nubian desert, and another part came up the Sahara on caravans whose other principal cargo was people. The excellence

at the top was produced by the coercion at the bottom, in the direct and physical sense that the metal passed from one to the other.

This collection has already insisted that admiring and polemical readings perform the same netting operation and are wrong in the same way. This module makes the point sharper by removing the distance between the columns. It is not that a fine civilisation coexisted with a brutal one; it is that the fineness was *made of* the brutality, and both belong on the page in the same sentence, with no arithmetic performed between them.

Three, on method: an exceptionally rich archive does not merely add evidence, it reweights the entire picture toward whatever it happens to record — and the corrective is to test conclusions against sources that nobody composed.

The Geniza's survival is an accident of a religious scruple about discarding writing that might bear the name of God. Everything this study knows in detail about eleventh-century commerce, family life, charity and the poll tax it knows because of that scruple. And the same accident means that the fraction of Fatimid Egypt which was Jewish, urban, literate and engaged in long-distance trade is documented at a level of texture that the Coptic peasantry — very likely still the largest single population in the country — will never receive.

The instruction that follows is general and cheap to apply: **wherever one body of evidence is far richer than the others, treat its subject matter as over-represented by exactly that margin, and anchor the picture on sources that were not composed at all.** Tailings, coin dies, mint distributions, pollen, flood gauges and building foundations have no audience and no interest. They are worse than documents at telling you what people thought and better than documents at telling you what was happening.

A note on sources. The *kharāj* range of roughly 2.8 to 3.5 million dinars a year rests on Abu Salih the Armenian, writing in the early thirteenth century and reporting the days of al-Mustansir, and on al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), who gives 3,100,000 dinars from a survey conducted under the vizier al-Afdal; the range and its handling follow the modern scholarship, principally Hassanein Rabie and W. J. Hamblin, paraphrased and credited. Both underlying figures are assessments rather than receipts, both reach us at two centuries' distance or more, and the Egyptian revenue genuinely varied year by year with the flood, so the range should be read as an order of magnitude and nothing finer. The poll-tax yield of about 130,000 dinars a year is from the Ayyubid administration under Ibn Mammati and is given only as an indication of scale under a later regime.

The Wadi Allaqi evidence — the fortified settlements, the workings in the secondary deposits, the inclined washing tables and their tailings, the rotary quern and its effect

on recovery, the forts at Derahib, the ceramic evidence for several populations, the dating of the early Arab peak to the tenth and eleventh centuries and of the north-east Sudanese working to about 1350, and the extraction of gold and emeralds by chattel slaves between roughly the ninth and thirteenth centuries — is paraphrased from the published archaeological survey of the Egyptian and Nubian gold fields (Klemm and colleagues) and from the archaeology of slavery in the region, and is credited. This is the module's strongest evidence precisely because it is not a text. What it does not establish is quantity: no estimate of Fatimid output from these workings is offered here, because none that this study could rely on exists, and the argument does not require one.

The *baqt* is described from the later compilers — Ibn Abd al-Hakam (d. 871), al-Maqrizi, and the modern synthesis in the Coptic Encyclopaedia and in W. Y. Adams — and paraphrased. No original document survives; the agreement may have begun as an oral understanding and been codified later; the figure of 360 slaves a year is calendrical in form and should be treated as a conventional number rather than a count; the date is given as 652 following the majority, though 632 and 651 both appear in the literature for the campaign or the agreement; and the later reduction to a triennial delivery is reported without a firm date. What is not in doubt, and is what the module rests on, is that an annual or periodic delivery of enslaved people from Nubia to Egypt was a standing arrangement across the whole Fatimid period.

The shift of Indian Ocean traffic from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, the revival of Aydhab and Quseir with Qus as the Nile terminus, Aden's control of the strait, the appearance of Chinese ceramics in Egypt from the eleventh century, and the date of 1097 for the earliest Geniza document on the India trade, are paraphrased from the modern scholarship — Goitein, David Whitehouse, the Peacocks, and Tim Power — and credited. Power's caution that the prominence of the India trade in the literature partly reflects the Geniza's dominance in the field is his, is quoted in substance in the text, and is the source of this module's methodological section. Al-Maqrizi's statement that the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan began using the Aydhab route in 1058 is his and is reported as such.

The flax trade, the *ṭirāz* workshops and the Sijilmasa revenue are as established in earlier modules; the Sijilmasa figure of about 400,000 dinars a year remains unverifiable and is repeated here with the same flag. The Sitt al-Mulk assignment of about 100,000 dinars a year in 390/1000, including estates, houses, orchards and customs revenue, is from the modern scholarship on Fatimid women and property and is credited; it is the basis of the correction to the earlier module and that correction is stated in the text rather than buried here.

The events of 1068 — the fortnight of sales, the emeralds valued at 300,000 dinars sold for 500, and the dispersal and destruction of the library — come from the compilers, principally al-Maqrizi, at nearly four centuries' remove, and are reported as their reports. The figure of thirty million dinars for the goods disposed of in that fortnight is explicitly not used. The emerald ratio is used, and a reader who thinks a compiler invented it for effect is entitled to discount the paragraph; the module's argument does not depend on it.

The muster categories of purchased slaves in the Fatimid army are as given in the second module, from Nasir-i Khusraw in Schefer's public-domain French translation, and the numbers attached to them are not used here or anywhere.

MODULE 7

Written on the Doors of the Mosques

Information and suppression — the one number the whole country waited for, the channels the state owned, the asymmetry this order wrote into its own theology, and the two years in which a government put curses on its walls and then scraped them off.

Sixteen cubits

The most important fact in Egypt each year was the height of the flood, and it was known at one place, by one set of officials, before it was known anywhere else.

The gauge on the southern tip of Rawda island is an octagonal marble column graduated in nineteen cubits, standing in a stone-lined well — rectangular at the top, circular at the bottom — fed from the river through three openings at three levels by a tunnel with pits in it to slow the water. It was built in 861 to the design of the astronomer al-Farghani, on the order of an Abbasid caliph. Ibn Tulun repaired it; the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir repaired it again in 1092. It is the oldest structure surviving in Egypt from the Islamic period in anything like its original form, and it is a fiscal instrument.

Sixteen cubits was the threshold. At sixteen the flood was sufficient — the *wafā'* — the earth dam across the canal was cut, the water was let into Cairo, and the year's assessment proceeded on the basis of a normal harvest. Below sixteen meant shortage; well below meant famine; nineteen meant catastrophe of the other kind.

Now consider what that architecture does, quite apart from anybody's intentions.

Every cultivator in Egypt had a direct and urgent interest in the number. His food, his tax, his family's year and possibly his survival turned on it. He could not measure it himself: the flood arrives over months and its meaning is a comparison against a scale that exists in one well on one island four hundred kilometres from most of the country. He learned the number when the state announced it — by criers in the streets, and then by the great public cutting of the dam, which was the announcement made into a festival, with the caliph riding out under the parasol and the whole army parading and ten thousand gilded saddles going by.

That is an information monopoly produced by geography and masonry rather than by policy. The state did not have to suppress anything to hold it. It simply owned the only instrument.

Whether the readings were ever falsified, this study cannot say. The claim circulates and it is plausible — a government whose revenue is set by a number it alone reads has an obvious motive — but no source that would settle it was found, and it is not asserted here. The structural point does not require it. **A population that learns the size of its own harvest from a government announcement is dependent on that government for its picture of its own year, whether or not the government is lying.**

The master of letters was the master of news

The other channel the state owned ran horizontally, and it was old before the Fatimids inherited it.

The *barīd* was the caliphal post: relay stations at intervals of a few miles along the trunk routes, stocked with fresh mounts and fodder, running from the capital to the provinces. In the ninth century, on Ibn Khurradadhbih's count, there were some nine hundred and thirty stations across the Abbasid empire; new ones could be raised temporarily to follow an army. The Fatimids ran their own, from Cairo west to the Maghrib and east into Syria, and added a pigeon post whose birds were valuable enough that their pedigrees were kept in a register. During the First Crusade a pigeon carrying a warning to Caesarea was taken by a hawk over a Crusader camp and the message read by the wrong people — which is the sort of accident that only gets recorded when the system usually works.

The essential feature is in the job title. The man in charge of the post, the *ṣāḥib al-barīd*, was also the *ṣāḥib al-khabar* — the master of letters was the master of news. Provincial postmasters reported to the ruler directly and independently of the governor they lived beside, which is why a governor contemplating revolt had to arrest his postmaster before he did anything else.

So the state's own information ran on a wire it owned and nobody else could use. A merchant could send a letter by a friend on a ship; a village could send nothing anywhere. The asymmetry between what Cairo knew about the provinces and what any province knew about Cairo, or about the next province, was not incidental. It was the system's principal product after the mail itself.

The seam written into the doctrine

And now the thing that makes this case different from every other in the collection, and which has been sitting in the argument since the third module without being named.

Isma'ili doctrine as the Fatimids held it distinguishes the *ẓāhir* from the *bāṭin* — the outward, which is the law and the practice and is for everybody, and the inward, which is the meaning beneath the letter and is not. The inward is released in stages, to individuals judged ready for it, by authorised teachers, under an oath.

The institutional form of that was described earlier: the sessions of wisdom, held in a hall of the palace, restricted to those who had sworn the *mīthāq*, on texts the Imam approved personally before they were delivered, with parallel courses for the great, for officials, for palace women, for the public and for foreign visitors. Public sessions on law after Friday prayers, open to anyone. Private sessions on meaning, open to the sworn.

Every order this collection has examined operates a gap between what the rulers know and what the ruled are told. What is unusual here is that the gap is not a practice. It is a doctrine. The Fatimid state's official, published, theological position was that there are two levels of truth, that the second is not for general distribution, and that access to it requires an oath of secrecy.

That has a consequence which runs through the whole study and which is worth stating flatly. **An order whose theology forbids it to tell everybody what it believes cannot form anybody.** The previous module on formation found that the Fatimids never installed a world-picture in the Egyptian child and asked why; the answer is partly the safe-conduct of 969 and partly this. There could be no Isma'ili catechism because a catechism is a summary handed to a beginner, and this doctrine's whole architecture is that beginners do not get the summary. The seam and the failure to form the population are not two findings. They are the same one.

Written on the doors

Which brings the module to two years in which a government wrote on its own walls and then washed them.

In 395 — 1005 — al-Hakim ordered curses against the first three caliphs and the Companions of the Prophet to be put up in public. Al-Maqrizi's phrase is وكُتب على أبواب المساجد — *and it was written on the doors of the mosques*. In a Sunni country, on the doors of Sunni mosques, the government inscribed the ritual condemnation of the men that country's Muslims revered.

In 397 — 1007 — the inscriptions were ordered removed.

Between those two dates falls a revolt. Abu Rakwa, an Umayyad claimant operating out of Cyrenaica with Berber and Bedouin support, rose in 1005, beat Fatimid forces, and got close enough to Cairo to frighten it, before being broken in 1006 and taken

and executed in 1007. Part of what he had raised his following on was the defence of the Companions.

Read as pathology, the sequence is a lunatic putting up insults and then taking them down. Read from the position, it is a government running an experiment and reading the result. The inscriptions were a cheap and visible assertion of the ruling confession in a country that did not hold it. The bill came in the form of an armed rising in the western desert with a religious grievance at its centre and a claimant of the old Umayyad line at its head. The inscriptions came down in the year the rising was finished.

That is a piece of information policy that can be dated, priced and evaluated, and both halves of it are on the record.

The decrees, and a trap named once

Al-Hakim's reign produced a very large body of *sijillāt* — formal decrees, read out in the mosques. They regulated administrative conduct and punished officials for embezzlement; they also regulated the streets, at times minutely, and from 1004 they turned on the protected communities.

The decree of October 1004 was read in the mosques and reasserted the old restrictions: distinguishing dress, the belt for Christians and distinctive marks for Jews, no public crosses, no bells. There followed restrictions on Christian festivals, closures, dismissals of Christian officials from the bureaux, and — in 1009 — the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which is the single act for which he is remembered outside the field and which had consequences in Europe for a century. From about 1012 the direction reversed again; the last years saw restorations and permissions, including permission for the converted to return to their former religion, which is a thing almost no Muslim ruler had done.

The seed of this study named three traps and this is the third of them. Al-Hakim's madness is a topos. The recent close work on the sources establishes that a great deal of what is said about him descends from one principal hostile narrative, transmitted through Sunni compilers writing under regimes with an interest in the Fatimid record. That does not make the church destructions invented — they are too well attested, from too many directions, including from Christian sources with no stake in Muslim polemic. It means the man has to be read through his position before he is read through a diagnosis.

The position, briefly. He came to the throne at eleven. His first regent was killed and his second, the eunuch who ran the palaces, was murdered in 1000. In 1005 he faced an Umayyad pretender whose cause included the defence of the Companions. In 1011 the

Abbasid caliph assembled the jurists and the Alid sharifs of Baghdad to certify in writing that he was a fraud, and the manifesto — as later summaries of the affair record — worked partly by charging him with excessive favour to non-Muslims. His oscillations on the dhimma track those pressures with a fair degree of legibility: hostility when the charge from Baghdad is favouritism, reversal when the cost of hostility is a wrecked administration whose clerks are Copts.

Legibility is not pardon. The Holy Sepulchre was destroyed and thousands of people's lives were disrupted, ruined and in some cases ended by decrees issued from that palace. What is claimed here is only that the decrees are readable as responses to a field, which the diagnosis of madness does not permit, and that a man who reverses a policy in the year its cost becomes visible is doing something other than raving.

The man who disappeared

On a night in February 1021 al-Hakim rode out into the hills east of Cairo and did not come back. His donkey and his bloodstained clothes were reportedly found. No body was recovered, and no account of what happened has ever been established.

What the state did with that absence is the most concentrated piece of information management in the study. It did not announce a death, because it had no death to announce; it did not announce a disappearance, because a caliph who has vanished is a caliph who might return. It managed a succession while leaving the question formally open.

And a group of missionaries who had come to Cairo from Persia and Central Asia in the preceding years, and who had already begun preaching that al-Hakim was more than an Imam, took the absence as confirmation. The movement that formed around them — driven out of Egypt, surviving in the mountains of Syria and Lebanon — holds to this day that he is in occultation and will return.

That is what an unexplained absence does inside a doctrine built on a hidden truth and an authorised interpreter. It becomes the truth. The whole Shi'i tradition had solved the problem of a line that stops by inventing the occultation; the Twelvers had done it in 873, and the Isma'ilis had built their movement on a hidden seventh Imam before a man at Salamiyya declared in 899 that the waiting was over. Occultation is an information solution. It converts an absence of knowledge into an article of faith, and the conversion is irreversible, because there is no evidence that could refute it.

What could move upward

One channel ran the other way, and it is well documented because a synagogue in Fustat did not throw paper out.

The Fatimid state took petitions. A subject — including a non-Muslim subject, including a poor one — could put a written complaint in front of the government, and the government answered it, in a standard chancery form, often favourably, and often against its own officials. The Geniza is full of the traces: complaints about tax collectors, appeals over communal disputes, requests for intervention, and the responses. The petition to the head of Egyptian Jewry about the three officials in Alexandria issuing unregistered poll-tax receipts, quoted in the module on the cost column, is one specimen of a very large genre, and the fraud it describes was fraud against the treasury too, which is precisely why complaining about it could work.

This is a real thing and it should not be patronised. A system in which a villager can obtain a written answer from the sovereign about the conduct of a tax farmer is doing something for its subjects that many later and richer states have not done.

It is also, structurally, the opposite of what it looks like. A petition is individual, retrospective, and dependent on the ruler's grace. It concedes nothing: answering ten thousand of them establishes no rule, creates no body, and gives no one a claim on next year. It is the perfect substitute for consent, because it satisfies the complaint without ever admitting the complainant into the decision.

And alongside the upward channel ran a downward extension of the state's reach into the incumbent apparatus. Under the vizier Badr al-Jamali, in the patriarchate of Cyril II between 1078 and 1092, the seat of the Coptic patriarch was moved from Alexandria to Fustat — that is, from the old ecclesiastical capital two hundred kilometres away to a mile from the vizier's own palace. It was, formally, a favour and a recognition. It also meant that the head of the largest non-Muslim body in Egypt now lived where he could be sent for.

Four hundred and thirty-seven years earlier, Amr ibn al-As had written to the provinces of Egypt promising protection to the place where the patriarch was, and told him to resume the government of his churches and his nation. The Fatimid vizier completed the operation. The apparatus that the first conquest had captured and left standing was now standing next door.

Reading information against the framework

Four things.

One, the contribution, and it is a distinction the collection has not drawn: a seam that is practised and a seam that is doctrinally required are different objects, and the second cannot be closed.

Every order runs a gap between what its rulers know and what its subjects are told. Normally that gap is a practice — widened in a crisis, narrowed when it is safe, denied when challenged, quietly abandoned when it stops paying. It is an instrument, and instruments can be put down.

The Fatimid gap was not an instrument. The two-level structure of truth, and the oath that gates the inner level, is the content of the claim that made the ruler a ruler. Take it away and there is no Imam, because there is nothing for an authoritative interpreter to interpret. So this state could not, even in principle and even if every caliph had wanted to, tell the population what it actually believed.

And an order that cannot tell its subjects what it believes cannot form them. That is the missing half of the finding in the module on formation. There it was argued that a graded, oath-gated doctrine is structurally incapable of installing a world-picture in children; here the same fact appears from the other side, as an information regime the order was not free to relax. The rule for testing elsewhere: **when an order's concealment is doctrinal rather than tactical, expect its formation of the general population to fail, and expect it to fail permanently rather than for a period** — because tactical concealment ends when it becomes expensive, and doctrinal concealment does not end at all.

Two, and this sharpens the earlier finding rather than adding a new one: anything a ruler can install by decree, a ruler can remove by decree — and that is the test of whether an item of a world-picture is load-bearing.

The curses went up on the doors of the mosques in 1005 and were scraped off in 1007. Two years, one revolt, and gone without residue. Apply the same test to the rest of the Fatimid public apparatus and it all fails: the coin legends changed with the reign, the *khuṭba* name changed on a Friday in 1171, the festivals of Ashura and Ghadir were state occasions with the Imam presiding and were gone within a generation of the dynasty. All of it was installed by decision and all of it was removable by decision.

Now apply it to the things that did not move. The Coptic calendar, which the Muslim tax office itself ran on. The alphabet the child learned in the *kuttāb*. The rite performed on Christian infants. No decree could have suspended any of them, because no decree had established any of them.

State it as a diagnostic: **to find out which parts of a people's world-picture are load-bearing, ask which of them a government could delete in an afternoon. Everything it could delete is decoration, however grand and however expensive.**

Three: an order with no institution for collective consent will usually have a well-developed institution for individual petition, and the second is a substitute for the first.

The previous module found that the Fatimid state never had to ask anybody for money, because none of its revenue streams could refuse, and consequently developed no institution for asking. This module supplies the complement. The state was highly responsive to individual complaint: petitions went up from villagers, minorities and the poor, in standard form, and were answered, sometimes against the state's own officials.

The two facts fit together exactly. Petition answers the grievance and concedes nothing — no body is created, no rule is established, no claim survives into next year, and the petitioner leaves as a supplicant who has been favoured rather than a party who has been owed. It is cheaper than representation and it produces contentment rather than institutions.

The general instruction is a warning about reading evidence: **a rich record of successful petitions is not evidence that a regime was accountable. It is often evidence of the opposite — that grievance had exactly one channel, and that channel ran through the ruler's grace.** Where consent is institutional, complaints go to a body and generate rules; where it is not, they go to the sovereign and generate favours, and the archive fills with the favours.

Four, honouring the trap the study named at the outset: al-Hakim's decrees are legible as responses to a field, and legibility is not pardon.

A caliph on the throne at eleven, his regents killed, facing an Umayyad claimant whose cause was the defence of the Companions, and a manifesto from Baghdad charging him among other things with favouring non-Muslims, produced a decade of oscillating decrees on exactly those two axes — the Companions and the dhimma — and reversed each one at roughly the point its cost became visible. The curses came down the year the revolt ended. The restrictions on Christians relaxed after the administration that ran on Christians had been damaged. Toward the end he permitted converts to return to their former religion.

None of that undoes the Holy Sepulchre or the ruined lives. It establishes only that a diagnosis is not needed to account for the decrees, and that reaching for one has usually meant not looking at the position — which is what the hostile tradition wanted, and what it got for a thousand years.

A note on sources. The Rawda Nilometer — the nineteen-cubit octagonal marble column, the stone-lined well with three fed openings, the design attributed to al-Farghani, the construction of 247/861, the repairs under Ibn Tulun and under al-Mustansir in 1092, and the sixteen-cubit threshold at which the canal dam was cut and

the assessment proceeded — follows the standard architectural and reference accounts and the Egyptian antiquities service's own description. The claim sometimes made that Egyptian governments deliberately falsified the readings could not be verified against any source this study would rely on, is not asserted, and is flagged in the text as unresolved; the argument is built instead on the monopoly created by the architecture, which is not in dispute.

The *barīd* — the relay stations, Ibn Khurradadhbih's count of some 930 across the ninth-century Abbasid empire, the identity of the *ṣāḥib al-barīd* with the *ṣāḥib al-khabar*, and the standing incentive for a rebel governor to seize his postmaster first — is paraphrased from the standard reference literature, principally Adam Silverstein and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and credited. The station count is Abbasid rather than Fatimid and is given for scale. The Fatimid pigeon post and the register of pigeon pedigrees are from the same literature; the interception of a pigeon message by a hawk over a Crusader camp in May 1099 is reported by the chroniclers of the First Crusade and is repeated here as their report.

The *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* distinction, the *mīthāq*, and the conduct of the sessions of wisdom are as established in the module on formation, from Heinz Halm and Farhad Daftary, paraphrased and credited.

The curse inscriptions are dated to 395/1005 and their removal to 397/1007 following the recent close study of the historiography of al-Hakim's reign, which itself rests on al-Maqrizi and Ibn al-Athir and on S. A. Assaad's political study; the Arabic phrase وكُتب على أبواب المساجد is al-Maqrizi's as quoted in that scholarship, and this study has not seen it in a critical edition. Irene Bierman's work on Fatimid public inscriptions is the standard treatment of the material and is credited. The connection between the erasure and the defeat of Abu Rakwa is drawn in the same scholarship — some sources give the defence of the Companions as part of Abu Rakwa's cause — and the causal reading offered here is an inference from the sequence rather than a statement in any source. It is the module's most exposed argument and a reader may reasonably prefer coincidence.

The decree of October 1004 and the subsequent measures against Christians and Jews, the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009, the reversals from about 1012 including permission for converts to return to their former faith, and the general character of the *sijillāt*, follow the standard accounts and are paraphrased. The observation that much of the hostile portrait descends from a single principal narrative transmitted through later Sunni compilers is the conclusion of the recent historiographical work and is credited to it, not claimed as this study's discovery.

The disappearance of al-Hakim in February 1021, the reported finding of his donkey and bloodstained clothes, the absence of a body, and the origins of the Druze movement among missionaries arriving from Persia and Central Asia from about 1017, follow Daftary and the standard accounts. No explanation of the disappearance is offered here because none is established; the sources offer several and they cannot be adjudicated.

Fatimid petitioning practice and its chancery forms are paraphrased from the modern scholarship, principally Marina Rustow and Geoffrey Khan, and credited. The characterisation of petition as a substitute for consent is this study's argument and not theirs. The transfer of the Coptic patriarchal seat from Alexandria to Fustat under Badr al-Jamali during the patriarchate of Cyril II (1078–1092) is from the standard accounts of the Coptic church; the reading of it as surveillance is an inference, and the alternative reading — that it followed the shift of Egypt's centre of gravity and was welcomed by the church — is at least as well supported and is not excluded here.

MODULE 8

Everything Except the Caliphate

The default — what each man inside the hierarchy was defending when he defended himself, why the arrangement broke at the army and not the bureaux, why it survived a century after it stopped working, and the moment the obtainable office acquired the power to choose the unobtainable one.

What each man held

The question this module asks is not who was in charge. It is what each man inside the arrangement stood to lose if the arrangement stopped, because that is what determines whether men who dislike each other will nonetheless keep it running.

Take the inventory as it stood around the year 1000, when the order was working.

At the apex, the Imam-caliph, holding an office that could not be transferred, sold, seized or shared, because it required descent from Ali and explicit designation by the previous holder. Below him from 979 the vizier, an office Ya'qub ibn Killis had effectively invented and which was, unlike the Imamate, obtainable — by a converted Jew from Baghdad, as it turned out, and later by purchased slaves and by Christians.

Then the chief missionary, the *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, who ran the mission at home and abroad, and the chief judge, whose office ran in the family of al-Qadi al-Nu'man for the better part of a century. Then the bureaux: revenue, army, chancery, staffed substantially by Copts and Jews, with a ceiling above which a Jew did not pass. Then the corps — Kutama, Berbers of other groups, Turks, black Africans, Bedouin, purchased slaves — each quartered in its own lane inside the caliph's enclosure, each on a monthly wage from the same treasury. Then the palace: eunuchs who ran the household and sometimes the state, and royal women with property, income and correspondence of their own. Then the provincial governors, and out beyond them, in Yemen and Sind and Persia and Syria, the missionaries.

Now ask of each: what happens to him if the arrangement ends?

The clerk in the revenue bureau loses a career that his community has spent three centuries learning to occupy and that no other employer in Egypt offers. The chief judge loses a jurisdiction. The Coptic bishop loses a hierarchy the state guarantees and collects through. The merchant loses the courts, the coinage and the net across his shop door. The missionary in Yemen loses his funding and his authority. The eunuch loses everything, having no family and no property outside the palace. Each of them,

defending his own position on any given Tuesday, was defending the arrangement without intending to and without needing to like anybody else in it.

That is the default, and for eighty years it worked as well as it has worked anywhere in this collection.

The flaw that was also the safeguard

Except in one place, and the place was deliberate.

The Fatimid army was multi-ethnic by design, and the design was a control device. A caliph garrisoned by Kutama alone would have been the Kutama's prisoner — as the first caliph very nearly was, which is why he killed the man who commanded them in 911 and built a fortress with one gate. So the corps were diversified and balanced: Berbers, then Turks and Persians, then black Africans, then Bedouin, then whatever the slave markets supplied, no one of them strong enough to act alone, all of them quartered inside the same walls and paid from the same bureau in cash, monthly, with no claim on any taxpayer.

It worked. For a century no Fatimid caliph was overthrown by his own army, which is a better record than Baghdad's over the same period, and it was not luck.

But look at what balance does to the shape of the positions.

The clerk, the judge, the bishop, the mosque steward, the merchant and the missionary are **complements**. Each needs the others to be doing their jobs. A clerk defending his post is also defending the court that enforces his assessments and the road the grain moves on; nothing he can do to secure his own position damages anybody else's.

The corps were **substitutes**. Their function was identical, their commands were interchangeable, and they drew on one finite payroll. Everything one corps gained in stipend, quarters, command or favour, another lost. They were balanced *against* each other, which is another way of saying they were placed in permanent competition for a single pot.

While the pot was large enough, that competition was courtly and the caliph could arbitrate it, which was the point. The moment the pot shrank, each corps defending its own position was necessarily attacking the others, and no amount of loyalty to the dynasty could alter the arithmetic, because the thing they were fighting over was the dynasty's money.

The default and the fracture were the same institution, seen at two different levels of revenue.

The queen who had been sold

The fracture, when it came, ran through the palace before it ran through the streets, and it has a thread in it that this study has already touched from the other end.

Some time before 1036 the caliph al-Zahir bought a slave concubine of sub-Saharan African origin from a Jewish merchant family of Tustar established in Fustat. She bore him a son; he declared the boy his heir; and when the boy came to the throne at seven as al-Mustansir, she became *malika* — queen — and in practice the regent of Egypt for the better part of thirty years. Her name was Rasad. She wrote to the Sulayhid queen of Yemen under her own insignia, through the Fatimid chancery, in her own name.

The merchant who had sold her was Abu Sa'd al-Tustari. His brother Abu Sa'id, brought to Cairo by Rasad as her steward and counsellor, is the jeweller with three hundred silver tubs of fruit trees on his roof whom the sultan's soldiers murdered in 1047, and whose killers were dismissed with a single question through a eunuch at the palace gate — the episode that this study used to show that the Fatimid state guaranteed property absolutely and the person not at all.

Two decades later the same queen, herself of Sudanese origin, threw the weight of the palace behind the black African regiments in their quarrel with the Turks over unpaid stipends.

There is no need to make this a morality tale. It is a demonstration of the mechanism. A hierarchy composed of substitute positions does not fracture along ideological lines, because there are no ideological lines inside it; it fractures along whatever cleavage is available, and the cleavage available in Cairo was ethnic origin, because the corps had been recruited by ethnic origin in order that they should never combine. The queen sided with the corps she came from. The vizier al-Yazuri had already favoured the black African units, which alienated the Turks. Everybody was defending his own position, and every position was somebody else's loss.

From 1062 the corps fought each other openly. Viziers came and went — the counts vary and the higher ones circulating in the literature should be treated as expressions of chaos rather than as tallies, but five in the two years to 1062 is well attested and the turnover thereafter was extraordinary by any standard. In 1067 the Turks under Nasir al-Dawla ibn Hamdan beat the Africans, took Cairo, and stripped the palace and the treasury; in 1069 the Turks turned on Nasir al-Dawla, who raised Bedouin allies, took the Delta and cut the capital's food off. The emeralds went for five hundred dinars and the library was burned for kindling.

Note what did not fracture. The revenue bureaux went on assessing. The courts went on sitting. The Coptic hierarchy went on functioning. The Geniza shows merchants still trading, communities still collecting for the poor tax, contracts still

being drawn. The complements held through a seven-year famine and a civil war. The substitutes destroyed the state.

Everything except the Caliphate

In 1073 the caliph al-Mustansir, whose palace had been looted and whose government had ceased to function, wrote secretly to the one substantial Fatimid commander left outside Egypt: an Armenian named Badr, born a slave and bought cheaply by a Syrian emir, converted to Islam, risen through the army to govern Damascus and then Acre.

Badr's answer was a condition. He would come if he could bring his own troops.

He landed late in 1073 and entered Cairo in January 1074. On his first night, his officers went round the city and killed the leading generals and officials.

Then he took the titles. Vizier, with plenipotentiary powers. *Amīr al-juyūsh*, Commander of the Armies — the name by which he is still known and which is on the gates of Cairo. And *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, Director of the Missionaries: the head of the religious mission, the office that ran the sessions of wisdom and the summoners abroad.

He married a daughter to the caliph. In 1078 al-Mustansir formally made over responsibility for all affairs of state to him. In 1085 he had his own son designated to succeed him.

A contemporary formulation of what he held has come down as: authority over everything except the Caliphate.

That is the exact shape of the thing and it deserves to be stared at. A purchased Armenian slave held the army, the government, the treasury and the headship of the Ismaili mission. He did not hold, and could not hold, and never attempted to hold, the office of Imam.

Why the Imam survived

Here the case turns a finding from this collection's earlier work on its head, and the reversal is the module's second contribution.

The study of al-Andalus established that an unobtainable office is a structural weakness: when the top position can be occupied only by one bloodline, and that bloodline fails, there is nobody the arrangement can promote and it comes apart into as many pieces as it has ambitious men. That is a correct account of what happened at Córdoba.

The Fatimid Imamate was more unobtainable than the Cordoban caliphate — it required not merely descent but explicit designation, and no fiction could supply

either. And it did not come apart. It survived a century in which real power was held by a succession of men who had no claim to it whatever, most of them foreigners, several of them purchased slaves, at least two of them Christians at the time of appointment.

The reason is that after 1073 the office no longer had to govern.

Consider Badr al-Jamali's position exactly. He has the troops and the treasury. Should he abolish the Imamate and rule in his own name? Every incentive says no, and they compound. He cannot hold the office himself, so abolishing it converts a source of his own legitimacy into a vacancy — and a vacancy is something a rival could fill or claim to represent. Keeping it costs almost nothing: an income, a palace, a ceremonial. And an Imam who cannot be replaced by any other candidate is an Imam who cannot be used against him, because there is no alternative claimant for an opponent to raise. The office's very unobtainability, which had been the dynasty's constitutional problem, became the strongman's guarantee.

So the finding needs a clause added: **an office nobody can take is a liability while it must govern and an asset once it need not.** Separate the sacred office from the governing office, and the unobtainable one becomes the safest object in the building — kept alive by the very men it excludes, precisely because it excludes everybody equally.

That separation is the constitutional event of Fatimid history, and it is the reason this study takes 1073 rather than 969 as its central hinge. The conquest of Egypt changed the order's address, its revenue and its scale, and changed nothing about how it was constituted. 1073 changed what the Imam was for. After it, the man at the top of the Ismaili world was the object of a religion and the occupant of a household, and the state was run by whoever had the last army through the gate.

The price

The arrangement worked, and then it was destroyed by the one move that its own logic made available.

Badr died in 1094. His son al-Afdal succeeded him — and note by whose insistence: the caliph wished to take the powers back, and the Armenian troops, whose stipends and commands and standing were all attached to the house of Badr, insisted that al-Afdal inherit every one of his father's offices. That is the default working perfectly. Men defending their own positions defended an arrangement in which a slave's son inherited the government of Egypt.

Al-Mustansir died the same year, after fifty-eight years on the throne, having designated his elder son Nizar. Al-Afdal set Nizar aside and installed his younger brother, whose sister al-Afdal had married, as al-Musta'li. Nizar revolted and was destroyed in 1095.

And there the arrangement cut its own throat.

The whole value of the Imamate — to the believer, to the missionary, and above all to the vizier who ruled in its name — lay in its being beyond human selection. Descent and designation are the two things a man cannot arrange. The instant a vizier chose which son would be the Imam of the age, the Imam of the age was a vizier's choice, and everything the office had been worth was gone.

The people who understood this best were the ones furthest from Cairo and least dependent on it. The missionaries of Persia and Syria — the branch of the movement that had actually built households and formed children, in countries where the Fatimid state had no troops, no treasury and no payroll — refused. Hasan-i Sabbah, who had been in Cairo and had known al-Mustansir's court, took the Persian mission over to Nizar's line, seized Alamut, and never acknowledged Cairo again. Yemen and Gujarat eventually went their own way too.

Set that beside what the module on formation established. Ismailism survived the fall of the dynasty only because of what had been built where the dynasty had no power. In 1094 the dynasty's own vizier, exercising a power the arrangement had handed him, drove exactly that part of the movement out.

The last hundred years

What followed is the arrangement running on, visibly, without the thing it had been built around.

The vizierate became the prize and it was hereditary in fact and contested in practice. Six of the men who held it were Armenians. One, Bahram, was a Christian and remained one, ruling a caliphate whose head was the Imam of the age. Another, Yanis, was an Armenian military slave, likewise Christian by origin, in office nine months before he was poisoned. Al-Afdal's son Kutayfat, in 1130, went further than anyone and tried to replace the Fatimid Imamate itself with allegiance to the hidden Twelver Imam, with himself as the hidden Imam's deputy; he lasted a year.

The caliphs were increasingly children when they succeeded — five, four, nine years old — which suited everybody with a position to protect and nobody else. And in the 1160s two rival viziers, Shawar and Dirgham, fought over the office by inviting in outside armies: Shawar brought in Nur al-Din's Syrians, and both sides at various points dealt with the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Shirkuh came, and then his nephew, and in 1169 that nephew became vizier of Egypt.

He was a Kurd, a Sunni, and the last Fatimid vizier. In 1169 he began converting the army from cash salaries to land assignments. In September 1171 he had the Friday

sermon read for the Abbasid caliph, and the last Imam died in his palace a few days later without being told.

Nobody defended it. By then there was almost nobody left inside the arrangement whose position depended on the Imamate rather than on the vizierate, and the vizier was the man ending it.

Reading the default against the framework

Three things.

One, the contribution: a default holds only where the positions inside it are complements. Where they are substitutes, each man defending his own position attacks the arrangement instead of defending it — and rulers manufacture substitute positions deliberately, as a safety device, without seeing what they have bought.

The collection's account of the default is that a durable hierarchy is one in which every member, pursuing nothing but his own interest, ends up defending the whole. This case shows the account needs a sorting step, and supplies the criterion.

Sort the positions by asking whether one holder's gain is another's loss. The Fatimid civil administration was a set of complements: the revenue clerk, the judge, the mosque steward, the Coptic bishop, the merchant, the missionary abroad. None of them could improve his position by damaging any of the others, and all of them needed the rest to be working. Those positions held through seven years of famine, a sacked palace and a civil war, and are visible in the Geniza still doing their work on the other side.

The Fatimid army was a set of substitutes. Interchangeable function, interchangeable commands, one payroll. And it was built that way on purpose: an army of one people would have owned the caliph, so the caliph recruited five peoples and balanced them. That device worked for a century — no Fatimid caliph was ever overthrown by his own troops — and its bill came due the first time the revenue fell far enough that the pot could not cover the claims on it. Then the corps did precisely what the default predicts. Every man defended his own position. And because their positions were rivalrous, the sum of that defence was the destruction of the state.

State it for testing elsewhere: **inventory a hierarchy and sort it into complements and substitutes. The complements are the default and will hold under enormous stress. The substitutes are the fracture line, and they will be found wherever a ruler has balanced rivals against one another for his own safety.** The control device and the fault line are the same institution, and the ruler who installs it is buying a century of security with an eventual civil war.

Two, a correction to an earlier finding: an office nobody can take is a liability while it must govern and an asset once it need not.

The al-Andalus study found the unobtainable office fatal — no one outside the bloodline could hold it, so when the bloodline failed the order had nobody to promote and shattered. The Fatimid Imamate was more unobtainable still, requiring designation as well as descent, and it was not fatal. It survived a century of rule by men who could never possess it, and they kept it alive on purpose.

The variable is whether the office is still required to govern. While it is, unobtainability is a bottleneck: the order cannot be run by the competent because the competent are ineligible. Once the governing function has been split off into an obtainable office, unobtainability becomes the sacred office's protection — nobody can take it, therefore nobody needs to destroy it, and no rival can raise an alternative holder of it against the man in power. The strongman's interest in preserving the thing he is excluded from is exact and it is why the Fatimid Imamate outlived its own state by ninety-eight years.

Three: the fracture came at the point where the obtainable office acquired the power to select the unobtainable one, and that is the move a divided-office arrangement must not permit.

In 1094 a vizier chose which son would be Imam. Every incentive pushed him to it — he had a sister married to one of them, and a child on the throne is a vizier's dream — and the arrangement gave him the means. But the entire value of the sacred office to the arrangement lay in its being outside human choice, and the moment a man made the choice, it was inside. The order lost the branch of its own movement that had done the only successful formation it ever managed, and lost it to a man who had sat in its own capital and knew exactly what had happened.

The general form: **where a hierarchy has split the sacred office from the governing one, the governing office must not be able to fill the sacred one. If it can, it will, and the act destroys the value it was preserving.** The arrangement is stable only while the succession runs on a rule nobody in it controls.

A last observation, which belongs to this module and will be carried into the preface. This is why the study is periodised on 1073. The taking of Egypt in 969 changed the order's address, its wealth and its scale and changed nothing about how it was constituted. The night in January 1074 when an Armenian slave's officers went through Cairo killing generals, and the settlement that followed it, changed what the Imam of the age was for. Everything after is a different constitution wearing the same name.

A note on sources. The inventory of offices — the vizierate as effectively created by Ya'qub ibn Killis from 979, the *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, the chief judgeship in the family of al-Qadi al-Nu'man, the ceiling on Jewish officials, and the ethnic composition and cash payment of the corps — is as established in earlier modules, from Nasir-i Khusraw in Schefer's public-domain translation and from the modern scholarship of Goitein, Lev, Cahen and Daftary, paraphrased and credited.

Rasad — of sub-Saharan African origin, purchased by the caliph al-Zahir from the Tustari merchant family, mother of al-Mustansir, styled *malika*, effectively regent from 1044, corresponding with the Sulayhid queen Arwa of Yemen under her own insignia through the Fatimid chancery, and backing the black African regiments in the factional crisis — follows the modern scholarship on Fatimid royal women, principally Delia Cortese and Simonetta Calderini and Taef El-Azhari, paraphrased and credited. The identification of her seller with the family of the Abu Sa'id murdered in 1047 rests on two independent lines: Schefer's footnote of 1881, drawing on the compilers, and the modern literature. It is nonetheless a genealogical identification made in later sources rather than a documented one, and the paragraph built on it is illustrative of a mechanism rather than load-bearing for the argument.

The factional war — al-Yazuri's favouring of the African units and his assassination, five viziers in the two years to 1062, the open fighting from 1062, the Turkish victory under Nasir al-Dawla ibn Hamdan and the sack of the palace and treasury in 1067, the Turks' turn against him in 1069 and his blockade of the Delta — follows the standard accounts, which rest ultimately on al-Maqrizi and Ibn Muyassar. Higher counts of vizieral turnover circulate (one figure in the literature is about forty viziers in fifteen years); they are not verified here and are described in the text as expressions of chaos rather than tallies.

Badr al-Jamali — Armenian, born a slave and purchased by the emir Jamal al-Dawla ibn Ammar, converted to Islam, governor of Damascus and then Acre, summoned by al-Mustansir on condition that he bring his own troops, landing late in 1073 and entering Cairo in January 1074, the killing of the leading generals and officials on his arrival, his titles of vizier with plenipotentiary powers, *amīr al-juyūsh* and *dāʿī al-duʿāt*, the marriage of his daughter to the caliph, the formal transfer of all state affairs to him in 1078, and the designation of his son in 1085 — follows the standard reference accounts and Heinz Halm, paraphrased and credited. His birth date is given variously between 1005 and 1015. The formulation that his authority extended over everything except the caliphate is the reference literature's summary rather than a quoted contemporary phrase, and is presented in the text as such; a reader should not take it

for a primary quotation, and the module's argument does not rest on the wording but on the three titles, which are not in dispute.

The succession crisis of 1094 — Badr's death, the Armenian troops' insistence that al-Afdal inherit all his father's offices against the caliph's wish, al-Mustansir's death after fifty-eight years, the setting aside of Nizar in favour of al-Musta'li, Nizar's revolt and destruction in 1095, and Hasan-i Sabbah's transfer of the Persian mission to the Nizari line — follows Daftary and the standard accounts. The detail of the Armenian troops' insistence comes from a popular account of the Armenian viziers and could not be traced by this study to a primary source; it is consistent with everything else known about the period and it illustrates the module's central mechanism almost too neatly, which is a reason for caution rather than confidence. A reader who discards it loses an illustration and not an argument.

The later vizierate — six Armenian holders across the following century, Bahram al-Armani serving as a Christian, Yanis an Armenian military slave poisoned after nine months in 1131–2, Kutayfat's attempt in 1130 to substitute allegiance to the hidden Twelver Imam, the child caliphs, the contest between Shawar and Dirgham and the intervention of Nur al-Din's army, Saladin's appointment as vizier in 1169, his conversion of the army to land assignments, and the *khuṭba* of September 1171 — follows the standard accounts and is paraphrased.

The claim that the civil administration held while the army fractured is an inference from the continuity visible in the Geniza documents through the crisis years and from the absence of any report of the fiscal bureaux ceasing to function; it is not a claim any source states directly, and it is the module's most exposed general assertion. The counter-case is real: the compilers describe administrative breakdown in these years, and revenues certainly collapsed. What is claimed here is narrower — that the civil positions did not turn on each other, which is a different thing from their continuing to work well.

MODULE 9

Glory of the Two Parties

Plurality or foreclosure — what protection existed against the apparatus, which factional fight produced it, what was lost and how, and why the men who were guaranteed everything and given nothing were the ones who inherited the country.

What there was not

Begin with the foreclosure, because it is total and because the protections only make sense against it.

There was no assembly. There was no estate, no council, no corporation of any kind whose consent was required for anything. No tax was ever put to any body for approval, no law was ever debated, and no institution existed through which a group of subjects could collectively make a claim on next year. The previous module on extraction explained why: not a single one of the state's revenue streams could refuse, so the state never had to ask, and an institution for asking is built only by rulers who must ask.

There was no independent legal establishment inside the ruling confession. In the Sunni world of the same century the *'ulamā'* were a genuine counterweight — self-recruiting, funded by endowments the ruler did not control, deriving their authority from consensus rather than from appointment, and capable of telling a sultan he was wrong. In Fatimid Egypt the law of the state came from the Imam, who was infallible by definition, and the chief judgeship was held for the better part of a century by one family of Ismaili jurists. There was no position from which anyone could tell the caliph he had erred, because the doctrine that made him caliph was that he could not.

And the great property shelter of the Islamic world was, here, a government department.

The *waqf* — property dedicated in perpetuity to a purpose, and thereby made inalienable — is the institution that in later centuries allowed families across the Islamic world to put their estates beyond a ruler's reach, and its capacity to do so is real, though the scholarship is divided about how far the motive was actually protective rather than pious. Whatever the general case, in Fatimid Egypt the endowments were administered by the *dīwān al-aḥbās*, a bureau of the state; the villages of the Fayyum paid an annual charge to it for the upkeep of their mosques. Saladin, on taking power, took over that

bureau and reorganised its revenues, which tells you what it was. The instrument that elsewhere shielded property from the ruler was, in this country, the ruler's own office.

So: no consent, no counterweight, no shelter. On the vertical axis between subject and apparatus, Fatimid Egypt is as foreclosed as anything in this collection.

And yet by the standards of its century it was among the most plural societies on earth, and the plurality was durable, legally real, and generated actual protections. The rest of this module is about where that came from, and the answer is not toleration.

The instrument, and what grew out of it

The founding protection is the safe-conduct of July 969, and it is the paradigm case of the mechanism this module exists to trace.

Five men — a sharif descended from the Prophet, two of Alid and Hashimite descent, a notable, and the chief judge — rode out to Jawhar's camp at Tarruja and asked for terms in writing. They were bargaining from a real position: the country had no government, its army had split and half of it had been expelled, the grain had stopped moving, and the conqueror needed Egypt intact rather than stormed. They got a document guaranteeing their persons, their property, their lands and all their circumstances; their legal schools; their call to prayer and their fast; their mosques maintained and staffed; and the protected communities left on their established footing.

Nobody had a right to any of that. What they had was leverage at a moment when the man with the army needed something from them, and the good sense to demand the concession in writing rather than in promises. That is where every real protection in this study comes from, and it never comes from anywhere else.

What grew out of it, over two centuries, was legal pluralism of an order almost nowhere else achieved. In eleventh-century Egypt there operated simultaneously: the Ismaili law of the state, in the courts of the chief judge; the four Sunni schools, in their own courts, for the majority of Muslims; the canon law of the Coptic church, under a patriarch the church itself elected; the law of the Rabbanite Jews, in two versions, one deriving from the academies of Iraq and one from those of Palestine; and the law of the Karaite Jews, who rejected rabbinic tradition altogether. Half a dozen incompatible legal systems, in one country, under one sovereign, none of them abolishing the others.

Nobody designed that. It was residue.

The man the chancery had to confirm

The mechanism that turned the guarantee into a working structure was appointment, and appointment worked in a way that turns out to be the module's whole finding.

When the Fatimids took Egypt they recognised and chartered the Gaon of the Palestinian academy as the head of the Jews in their domain — a document establishing this was identified and published by Goitein. Among the prerogatives that went with the charter was the exclusive right to appoint Jewish judges throughout the Fatimid realm.

But a Geniza petition survives in which the chancery is asked to reinvest an Alexandrian judge whom the Gaon had already appointed. The Gaon's own appointee needed the caliph's confirmation to function.

Hold that. The community's head could appoint, and his appointment was not effective until the state ratified it. Which means every dispute inside the Jewish community — over who held the chair, over who could sit as judge, over which academy's authority ran where — ended up in the Fatimid chancery, because that was where authority was made real.

The same architecture governed everybody. The Coptic patriarch was elected by his own church, which the state did not interfere with, and then had to be recognised by the state, which the state generally did. The Sunni schools kept their courts and their jurists, and the government appointed nobody to head them and therefore held no lever over them at all — which is worth noticing and will matter at the end of this module.

The factional fight

Now the sequence, because it is dated and because it produced an institution that lasted.

The tie between the Jerusalem academy and the Fatimid court had been maintained by a figure in Fustat named Elhanan ben Shemarya, and in the 1020s he broke with his superiors and moved from deference to open revolt, taking the Egyptian Rabbanites of Fustat with him in an attempt to get out from under the jurisdiction of Jerusalem and Baghdad altogether. That cost the academy its principal channel to the court, and precipitated a leadership crisis.

The geonim of Jerusalem answered it by making an alliance — with the Karaite notables of Fustat and Cairo.

The Karaites were, doctrinally, the other party: Jews who rejected the whole edifice of rabbinic interpretation and claimed the right to read the law for themselves. They were also, and this is the operative fact, better represented at the Fatimid court than the Rabbanites were. Karaite grandees held high office; Rabbanite leaders did not. And the Karaites were neutral in intra-Rabbanite quarrels, which made them ideal intercessors. The petitions addressed to them survive; one such courtier carried an honorific rendered in the modern study of these documents as *Glory of the Two Parties*.

A rabbinic leadership that wanted its own appointments confirmed had to go through men whose entire position was that rabbinic tradition was not binding.

Then, in 1038, a senior member of the Jerusalem academy named Nathan ben Abraham used Karaite support to seize the gaonic chair. For four years — from the festival of Hoshana Rabba in 1038 to the same festival in 1042 — two men claimed the Palestinian gaonate and both exercised its prerogatives, while their followers fought for control of the synagogue at Ramla. The affair drew in the Jewish communities of Qayrawan, Damascus and Tripoli. Both sides petitioned Cairo.

Out of that four-year fight came the office of the territorial head of the Jews of Egypt.

Why that produced something permanent

The mechanism is worth stating slowly, because it is the general answer to where protections come from and it is not obvious.

Two claimants both petition the sovereign for recognition. The sovereign has to decide. But before he can decide, he has to know what he is recognising — over which persons, in which territory, with which powers, appointing which officials, and against which appeals. A vague authority that everyone acknowledged in principle becomes, at the moment two men claim it, an authority somebody has to define in writing in order to award it.

That written definition then outlives both claimants and both factions. It is a jurisdiction. It has boundaries. It can be appealed to by people who were not born when the quarrel happened.

Factional fights produce durable institutions because they force the arbiter to specify. Nobody in 1038 intended to create the office of head of the Jews of Egypt; both parties were trying to win a chair in Jerusalem. What they produced by fighting was a document, and the document was the institution.

And there is a second protection generated by the same architecture, which explains why this state was so much more plural than its neighbours without being in any way principled about it.

If the ruler must appoint the head of every community, then every faction inside every community must have access to the court. And the court's leverage over any community depends entirely on there continuing to be at least two parties in it who need his ruling. A sovereign who permits one Jewish faction to destroy another has lost half his clients and gained nothing; a sovereign who lets the Copts govern themselves has acquired a working tax apparatus that costs him nothing; a sovereign who guarantees four Sunni schools has four bodies of jurists each of which needs his recognition and none of which can speak for all Muslims.

The plurality was maintained because plurality was the source of the ruler's leverage. He was not tolerating difference. He was arbitrating it, and an arbiter needs parties.

The ban that was not pronounced

The sharpest illustration is a thing that did not happen.

In 1029 a body of Rabbanites in Jerusalem agitated to pronounce a formal ban of excommunication against the Karaites. The Rabbanite leadership refused, and the Gaon's argument survives: that if the community began excommunicating people for gossip it would have to excommunicate most of itself, that magic was practised by many, and — the line that carries it — whether there were no commandments left to uphold except the ones that divided Rabbanites from Karaites.

It is a genuinely admirable statement and there is no reason to doubt its sincerity. It is also, read from the position, the only available answer.

A ban of excommunication is worthless without enforcement. A community with no coercive power of its own can only enforce a ban by having the state enforce it — by having the government refuse to recognise the banned, exclude them from communal office, and hand their institutions to the winning party. To pronounce a ban is therefore to petition the caliph to act against a group of his own subjects.

And the group in question had more influence at the Fatimid court than the men proposing the ban. A Rabbanite excommunication of the Karaites in 1029 would have been an appeal to a court where the Karaites were better placed, made by men whose own appointments the Karaites were helping to secure.

So the general principle: **a subordinate community's internal coercive power is capped at the level of state backing it can command against its own dissenters.** A minority whose dissenters are better connected at court than its establishment is, by that fact alone, a pluralist community — and the pluralism will be described afterwards, quite honestly, as forbearance.

What was lost, and how

The other half of the question is whether liberties were taken away, and there is a clean case with a clean reversal.

From October 1004 al-Hakim's decrees, read out in the mosques, reasserted the old restrictions on the protected communities: distinguishing dress, belts and marks, no crosses in public, no bells. There followed bans on Christian festivals, closures of monasteries, the dismissal of Christian officials from the bureaux, restrictions on synagogues — and in 1009 the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. From about 1012 the direction reversed: restorations, permissions, and eventually leave for those who had converted under pressure to return to the religion they had left.

Eight years of removal, then restoration, on the decision of one man, with nobody in a position to prevent either.

That is the test result. The protections of the Fatimid dhimma were real, legally operative, and enormously valuable to the people who held them. They were also owned by nobody. No body could assert them; no court could enforce them against the sovereign; no document created an obligation the sovereign was bound by. They existed because the ruler's interest was served by them, and when a caliph's interest changed — under pressure from a Baghdad manifesto that charged him with excessive favour to non-Muslims, and from an armed rising in the west with a confessional grievance — they went, and when the cost of their absence became visible in a wrecked administration whose clerks were Copts, they came back.

State the test plainly: **to find out whether a protection is a right or a by-product, ask what the ruler loses by withdrawing it. If the answer is nothing, it is a by-product; it will be withdrawn when his interest changes and restored when it changes back, and neither event will require anybody's consent.**

By that test, Fatimid Egypt had no rights and a great many valuable by-products.

The in and the out

Which leaves the question of who was inside the arrangement and who was outside it, and the answer produces the strangest fact in this study.

Inside were the corps, the palace, the bureaux, the Ismaili judiciary, the mission, and — as clients rather than members — the heads of the protected communities, each holding a charter and each needing periodic confirmation. The Copts and the Jews were *governed*, but they were governed through their own institutions by their own men under their own law, which is a great deal more than most minorities have had.

Outside, in a sense that no other group in the country occupied, was the Sunni Muslim majority of Egypt.

They had been guaranteed everything and given nothing. Their schools stood; their mosques were maintained and their staff paid out of the treasury, in every town from Syria to Qayrawan, as a traveller confirmed by walking the distance. Their jurists went on teaching and issuing opinions and running courts. And they held no corps, no command, no quarter in the caliph's city, no chief judgeship, no vizierate, and no place in the mission — because the mission's doctrine was the one thing they did not hold.

Now notice what follows. Because the state appointed nobody to head the Sunni schools, it held no lever over them. Because their authority derived from consensus among themselves rather than from a charter, no chancery confirmation could be withheld from them. The Coptic patriarch could be moved to Fustat and lodged a mile from the vizier's palace; the Jewish head could be made and unmade by rescript; the Sunni jurists of Egypt could not be reached at all, because there was no office to capture.

The Fatimids had promised in 969 not to touch them, and had kept the promise for two hundred and two years, and in keeping it had left standing, untouched and unappointed, the only body in Egypt that was both large and beyond the state's institutional reach.

In September 1171 a Kurdish vizier changed the name in the Friday sermon, and the men who had been guaranteed everything and given nothing became the establishment of Egypt, and stayed so. It took no revolution. The guarantee had done the work.

Reading plurality against the framework

Four things.

One, the contribution: factional fights produce durable institutions because they force the arbiter to specify.

The collection's account of liberty holds that protections are residue from bargaining among factions inside a hierarchy, never granted from above and never won from below. This case supplies the mechanism by which the residue hardens, and the mechanism is documentary.

When one man holds an authority, its boundaries need never be stated; everybody defers and nobody asks. When two men claim it and both petition the same sovereign, the sovereign cannot rule without saying what it is — over whom, where, with what powers of appointment, subject to what appeal. That specification is written down because a chancery writes things down, and once written it is a jurisdiction with edges, available to be invoked by people with no connection to the original quarrel.

The Palestinian gaonate had been chartered vaguely as headship of the Jews in the Fatimid domain. Four years of two claimants exercising the same prerogatives, with followers brawling over a synagogue in Ramla and communities from Qayrawan to Damascus taking sides, forced the definition — and what came out was the territorial office of the head of the Jews of Egypt, which outlasted the dynasty.

The instruction for looking elsewhere: **to find where an order's real protections came from, do not look for a moment of grant. Look for a moment when two parties inside the arrangement claimed the same thing and someone had to write down what it was.**

Two: plurality survives where it is the source of the arbiter's leverage, and this is a far more robust foundation than toleration, though it is not a right.

The Fatimid state maintained half a dozen legal systems, confirmed the heads of communities it did not belong to, and let a Christian serve as vizier of the Imam of the age. It did this without any doctrine of toleration and while holding that its own ruler was the sole authority on the meaning of God's law.

The reason is structural. An arbiter's power is a function of there being parties. Let one faction annihilate another and the arbiter has fewer clients and no more authority. So the ruler's self-interest ran, continuously and without any need for virtue, toward preserving every division in the country — which produced a durable pluralism that no principle was defending and that nobody could take away by argument.

The corollary is the diagnostic given above: **ask what the ruler loses by withdrawing a protection.** Where the answer is *an arbitration he profits from*, the protection is robust though unowned. Where the answer is *nothing*, it will go the first time a caliph feels pressed, as it did in 1004.

Three: a subordinate community's power to coerce its own members is capped by the state backing it can command against them.

This is the finding the 1029 affair yields and it generalises to every community inside every order in this collection. A minority's leadership can pronounce whatever it likes; enforcement requires an arm, and the only arm available belongs to the sovereign. Therefore the internal liberty of dissenters within a subordinate community is set not by the tolerance of its leadership but by the dissenters' access to the court.

The Karaites of Fustat were safe from excommunication because they were better connected in Cairo than the men who wanted to excommunicate them. That is not an edifying explanation and it is the operative one, and it holds the same way in reverse: where a community's establishment has the ruler's ear and its dissenters do not, the community will be as intolerant as its leadership wishes, and the difference will be described as doctrine.

Four, and it is the module's closing observation rather than a rule: an order that guarantees its rival's institutions has agreed to be survived by them.

The safe-conduct of 969 promised the Egyptians their legal schools, and that promise bought a country in five months without a battle at Fustat. It was kept, scrupulously, for two centuries. And because it was kept, the Sunni jurists of Egypt were never appointed by the state, never chartered by it, never confirmed by it, and therefore never had an office the state could capture — unlike the Coptic patriarch, who could be moved next door to the vizier, and unlike the head of the Jews, who could be made and unmade by rescript.

The Fatimids reached into every other institution in Egypt. The one they had promised not to touch is the one that outlived them, and it did not have to fight for the succession: a vizier read a different name on a Friday, and the men who had held their courts and their schools and their Friday prayer unmolested for two hundred and two years simply moved into the space.

The order's most scrupulously honoured promise was its heir.

A note on sources. The account of the Jewish communities under the Fatimids — the tripartite structure of Karaites, Babylonian Rabbanites and Palestinian Rabbanites; the Fatimid charter recognising the Palestinian Gaon as head of the Jews in their domain, together with his exclusive right to appoint Jewish judges; the petition for chancery reinvestiture of an Alexandrian judge the Gaon had already appointed; Elhanan ben Shemarya's break with Jerusalem and the loss of the academy's tie to the court; the geonim's countervailing alliance with the Karaite notables of Fustat and Cairo; the petitions addressed to Karaite courtiers; the affair of the ban of excommunication in 1029 and the Gaon's argument against it; and the schism of 1038–42 in which Nathan ben Abraham used Karaite backing to seize the gaonic chair and two men exercised the gaonate for four years while their followers contested the synagogue at Ramla, drawing in Qayrawan, Damascus and Tripoli — is drawn from Marina Rustow's study of the Jews of the Fatimid caliphate, and behind her from Jacob Mann and S. D. Goitein. It is paraphrased and credited. This module leans on one modern work more heavily than any other in this study, and that dependence is the honest weakness here: the Geniza documents underlying it are medieval and public, but this study has read them through her, and a reader who wants to check the argument must go to the book.

The honorific rendered as *Glory of the Two Parties*, used as this module's title, is the title of a chapter in that study, rendering an honorific borne by Karaite courtiers in the documents. It is not quoted here from a manuscript and should not be taken for a

verified primary text; it is used because it names the mechanism, and the mechanism does not depend on the wording.

The Gaon's argument against the 1029 ban is paraphrased from the same study's translation; the substance — that a community which excommunicated for gossip would excommunicate most of itself, that magic was widely practised, and the closing question about which commandments remained — is his, the compression is mine, and the structural reading of why the ban could not be pronounced is this study's argument and not Rustow's.

The *waqf* material is more contested than the text may suggest and the qualification belongs here as well as there. That family endowments served to shelter property from confiscation is asserted in some of the literature and disputed in the rest — Köprülü and Gerber have both argued against the confiscation-avoidance motive as a general explanation, Gerber on the evidence that in Ottoman Edirne the people with least to fear from confiscation founded the most family endowments. What is not disputed, and is what this module uses, is that in Fatimid Egypt the endowments were administered by the *dīwān al-aḥbās* as a department of state, that the Fayyum villages paid an annual charge to it, and that Saladin took the bureau over and reorganised its revenues.

The absence of an independent Sunni legal establishment inside the Fatimid state, the holding of the chief judgeship by the family of al-Qadi al-Nu'man, and the guarantees of the 969 safe-conduct are as established in earlier modules. Al-Hakim's decrees of 1004 onward, the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009, the reversal from about 1012 and the permission for converts to return, are as given in the module on information and suppression, with the same caution about the hostile transmission of that reign.

The closing argument — that the Sunni jurists of Egypt were uniquely beyond the state's institutional reach because the state had no office among them to capture, and that this is why they inherited in 1171 without a struggle — is this study's inference. No source states it. The counter-case deserves stating: the Fatimids did appoint qadis whose jurisdiction touched Sunnis, Saladin's Sunni restoration was actively built rather than passively inherited, and the founding of Sunni madrasas in Cairo was one of his first acts, which suggests he thought the establishment needed constructing rather than merely releasing. A reader may reasonably conclude that the inheritance was less automatic than this module presents it.

MODULE 10

Each Time He Was Invited

Change and collapse — what two hundred and sixty-two years of this order did to the proposition that structural change comes from the hierarchy and not from below, what popular violence actually accomplished when it appeared, and who opened the door in the end.

The thing that did not happen

The strongest evidence in this module is an absence, and it has to be stated before anything else because everything after it is an explanation of the absence.

In two hundred and sixty-two years of Fatimid rule, no rising of Egyptian cultivators, artisans or urban poor altered the structure of the state. Not one.

That is not because the material was lacking. Egypt under this dynasty produced conditions that any theory of popular revolution would predict to be sufficient. Between roughly 1065 and 1072 the Nile failed repeatedly; eleven of the twenty years from 1052 saw an inadequate flood; the compilers report cannibalism, the eating of dogs until the dogs ran out, and the depopulation of towns in the old capital area. The government stopped functioning. The palace was stripped. The library was burned for kindling. The army had split and was fighting in the streets, which meant that for several years the apparatus that normally suppresses risings was busy suppressing itself.

If suffering produced structural change, it would have produced it there. It did not.

Nor is the absence a feature of Egypt itself. Egypt had produced Coptic risings — repeatedly, through the eighth and into the ninth century, the last great one in the Delta marshes in 831, put down by the caliph al-Ma'mun in person. That is to say: the Egyptian countryside was perfectly capable of rising, had done so within living memory of the Fatimid conquest's grandfathers, and stopped. What stopped it was that the risings had been beaten, every time, by a functioning apparatus — which is the whole of the explanation and requires nothing further.

What popular violence actually did

Popular violence did occur under this dynasty, twice on a scale worth examining, and in both cases what it accomplished is instructive precisely because it is not nothing.

Ifriqiya, 1016. A bloody rising broke out in the Fatimids' own former heartland. Al-Mansuriya, the palace city outside Qayrawan from which the dynasty had ruled before it moved to Egypt, was destroyed. Shi'is were massacred in numbers the sources

put at twenty thousand, which is a traditional figure and should be read as *very many*. This was mass violence of the most direct kind, aimed at the ruling confession, and it succeeded in what it immediately attempted.

It changed nothing structural. The Zirid emirs went on governing Ifriqiya in the Fatimid name for another quarter of a century.

The structural change came later and came from one man. Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis, the fourth Zirid ruler, renounced the Fatimid caliphs and recognised the Abbasids of Baghdad at some point between 1041 and 1051 — the dating varies — and had the change struck on his coinage, denouncing his former overlords as heretics. He did it under the accumulated pressure of the Qayrawan jurists, of Sunni feeling in his towns, and of exactly the kind of violence that had destroyed al-Mansuriya in 1016.

So the popular energy was real and it was an input. It did not make the change. It raised the price of one option and lowered the price of another over thirty years, and then a man with an army and an office did a sum and switched the sermon. The riot was an argument. The emir made the decision.

Cairo, 1164. The vizier Dirgham, having been beaten in the field by an army his rival had fetched from Syria, was killed by the Cairo mob.

That is popular violence killing a head of government, and it decided nothing whatever. The hierarchy had already settled the question; the crowd executed a man the arrangement had finished with. It is worth recording because it is exactly the sort of episode that gets read as popular power, and because the sequence is unambiguous: the army arrived, the vizier lost, and then the crowd killed him.

The general shape is worth stating now and it will be stated again at the end: **when popular violence appears in a collapse, ask what it decided.** Almost always it either executed a decision already taken by men with troops, or supplied a pressure that an elite actor cashed later at a time of his own choosing.

Fracture

The changes that were structural all came from inside the hierarchy, and this order supplied an unusually complete set of specimens.

The corps, from 1062. The army had been built as a balance of ethnic contingents so that no single one could own the caliph — a device that worked for a century and whose bill is described in the module on the default. When the revenue fell far enough that the payroll could not cover the claims, the corps did what units competing for a single pot do. Black African regiments, backed by the queen-mother, attacked the Turks over stipends; the Turks under Nasir al-Dawla ibn Hamdan won, took Cairo, and stripped the palace and treasury in 1067; the Turks then turned on Nasir al-Dawla,

who raised Bedouin allies, took the Delta and cut off the capital's food. Viziers came and went so fast that the counts in the literature are better read as expressions of chaos than as tallies.

The provinces, 1041–1051. The Zirids of Ifriqiya had been Fatimid governors since 973 and were paying tribute — reported at a million gold dinars a year, a figure that reaches us at second hand and should be held loosely. Their realm was in fiscal crisis in the 1040s, with debased coinage, epidemic and famine. Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis switched to the Abbasids. That is a whole hierarchy defecting: a governor, his army, his jurists and his mint, transferring their allegiance in a body.

The movement, 1094. When the vizier al-Afdal set aside al-Mustansir's designated heir and installed his own brother-in-law, the missions of Persia and Syria refused, and Hasan-i Sabbah took the Persian *da'wa* over to Nizar's line and never acknowledged Cairo again. That fracture removed from Cairo's control the one branch of the movement that had actually formed households and children.

The office itself, 1130. Kutayfat, son of al-Afdal, went further than any of them: he attempted to abolish the Fatimid Imamate altogether and substitute allegiance to the hidden Twelver Imam, with himself as that Imam's deputy. He lasted about a year. The attempt is worth recording because it establishes that even the sacred office was, by then, a thing a vizier could contemplate replacing.

Four fractures, at four different levels of the arrangement — the corps, the province, the movement abroad, and the constitutional apex — and every one of them was made by men who held commands, offices or charters.

The punishment, and what it demonstrates

The Fatimid answer to the Zirid defection is the sharpest test in this module of what does and does not count as popular action.

Cairo did not send an army west; it had none to spare. Instead it directed westward the Arab tribes of the Banu Hilal and the Banu Sulaym, encamped in Upper Egypt, giving them leave and encouragement to move into Ifriqiya. They crossed Cyrenaica about 1050. On the fourteenth of April 1052, at Haydaran in what is now south-eastern Tunisia, a body of Hilali cavalry — reported at three thousand — broke a Zirid army reported at ten times that number. Qayrawan fell in 1057. The Zirids withdrew to Mahdia and never recovered; Ifriqiya fragmented and did not reconstitute itself for a century.

This episode is routinely described in a vocabulary — *tribes*, *migration*, *the Bedouin* — that makes it sound like a population on the move. It was not. It was an army.

The Banu Hilal were a confederation of sub-tribes, each with its own hereditary leadership: the Riyah, the Athbaj, the Zughba, the Jusham. Their chief at the time of the move into Ifriqiya was Mu'nis ibn Yahya of the Riyah, of the house of Mirdas, who negotiated with al-Mu'izz ibn Badis as one party to another and went to war when the emir arrested his family. A century later another Riyah emir, Muhriz ibn Ziyad, called the warlord of Carthage, was raised in a family of emirs and trained in arms from boyhood, held fortresses, was besieged by the admiral of Norman Sicily at Kelibia, and was proposed by the qadi of Tunis as ruler of the city. These were men whose sub-tribes were courted as allies by Almohad and Hafsid caliphs and treated as belligerents in their own right.

And the force at Haydaran is described in the sources as cavalry. Three thousand horsemen is a military establishment: horses, remounts, tack, weapons, and men whose occupation is fighting and who have been doing it since childhood. It is not a number of farmers. That is why three thousand of them broke thirty thousand — which is what a warrior aristocracy does to a levy, and is the least surprising thing in this module.

So the Banu Hilal are not a hard case for the framework's law. They are its clearest confirmation: an armed interest with a command structure, given leave by one government to attack another, doing what armed interests do. The reason they get mistaken for a popular movement is entirely a matter of vocabulary, and the vocabulary is worth naming as a trap. Words like *tribe*, *migration*, *horde*, *the people of*, and *the mob* flatten the distinction between an armed interest and a population, and the flattening usually runs in the direction that makes a military event look like a demographic one.

The people in this story who correspond to the framework's peasant are elsewhere in it, and they are easy to find. They are the cultivators of the Tunisian plains, who did not move, commanded nothing, decided nothing, and absorbed the whole cost.

A note on the aftermath. The older historiography, following Ibn Khaldun's famous image of the Hilali advance as a plague of locusts, treated the invasion as an ecological catastrophe that destroyed North African agriculture permanently. Modern work has substantially qualified this; the decline of Ifriqiyan agriculture had other and earlier causes, and the tribes' arrival was a long process rather than a single devastation. The political effect on the Zirid state, which is what this module uses, is not in dispute.

Repricing, and the letter

The framework holds that structural change can come from an apex whose own cost-benefit calculus has shifted far enough that it reprices the arrangement. This order supplies a specimen of that in which the moment of repricing can very nearly be dated, because it took the form of a letter.

By 1073 al-Mustansir had reigned thirty-seven years. His palace had been looted by his own troops, his treasury was empty, his library was gone, his capital's food supply had been cut by a general who had been his own commander, and his government did not function. He had one substantial commander left outside Egypt: Badr al-Jamali at Acre.

He wrote to him, secretly, and asked him to come. Badr's answer was a condition — that he bring his own troops — and al-Mustansir accepted it.

That is the whole of the repricing, and it should be looked at as an arithmetic rather than a tragedy. The caliph was not defeated and not deposed. He held an office nobody could take from him. What he calculated was that continuing to hold the government along with it was now worth less than surviving without it, and that a foreign commander with his own army was a better custodian of his person than the corps who had stripped his palace. He paid with the state and kept the office, and the office lasted another ninety-eight years.

Elite exhaustion, in this case, does not mean an elite that has run out of energy. It means an apex that has done a sum and found that the terms have changed.

The losses

Alongside the fractures ran a steady contraction that removed, one by one, the things that had paid for the arrangement.

Sicily, held since the Aghlabids and a Fatimid possession from the beginning, was taken by the Normans between 1061 and 1091. Ifriqiya was gone after 1051. The trans-Saharan terminus at Sijilmasa, which had supplied the gold and half the Maghrib's revenue, had long since passed out of reach. Syria was contested continuously and largely lost to the Seljuks. In July 1099 the Crusaders took Jerusalem from a Fatimid garrison that had itself only recaptured the city the previous year.

Every one of those was a source of revenue, a source of recruits, or both. And because this order paid its army in cash from a central treasury with nothing in between, each loss translated directly and immediately into a smaller pot for corps who were competing for it.

Each time he was invited

The end, when it came, was not a conquest. It has to be laid out in sequence because the sequence is the finding.

In December 1162 Shawar became vizier. Within months he was thrown out by a rival, Dirgham, and fled to Damascus, where he asked Nur al-Din — a Sunni ruler of Syria whose long-term object was Egypt — to send an army to put him back.

Meanwhile Amalric, king of Jerusalem, invaded Egypt in 1163 because Dirgham had stopped paying the tribute the Fatimids had been rendering to the Latin kingdom. Dirgham stopped him by breaking the Nile dams and flooding the country. He then negotiated with Amalric, offering peace and hostages.

In 1164 Nur al-Din sent his Kurdish general Shirkuh, with his nephew Saladin, to restore Shawar. They did. Dirgham was beaten and killed by the Cairo mob. Shawar, restored, promptly quarrelled with the men who had restored him and allied with Amalric instead, ceding ports and paying tribute reported in the millions. Frankish and Fatimid troops besieged Shirkuh together at Bilbeis.

Shirkuh came again in 1167. Amalric came again in 1168 and sacked Bilbeis, and Shawar burned Fustat — the old capital of Egypt, a city of tens of thousands — to deny it to the ally he had invited in four years earlier.

Shirkuh came a third time in December 1168, this time at the invitation of the caliph al-Adid himself. Amalric withdrew, and Shirkuh entered Egypt largely unopposed. In January 1169 he was received in audience by the caliph; Saladin arrested Shawar; and Shawar was executed on the caliph's order. The caliph appointed Shirkuh vizier. Shirkuh died on the twenty-third of March 1169, and the emirs of his army settled on his nephew as a compromise candidate.

Count the interventions. Amalric came because a vizier stopped paying. Shirkuh came three times: twice at the request of a vizier, once at the request of the Imam of the age. At no point was Egypt besieged, invaded against a united defence, or conquered in the ordinary sense. **The door was opened from the inside, every time, by a man inside the arrangement who was losing a fight within it.**

And when a group finally did try to reverse it by force, the result confirms the rest. In 1169 the black African regiments — the corps most bound to the old order, whose position depended entirely on it — rose against Saladin in Cairo. They were armed, they were numerous, and they were crushed by Shirkuh's Syrian troops under Saladin's brother. Even an armed body of the right kind fails against a functioning apparatus, if the apparatus is functioning and the army is somebody else's.

In 1169 the new vizier began converting the Egyptian army from cash salaries to land assignments. On the tenth of September 1171 he had the Friday sermon in Cairo read for the Abbasid caliph. Al-Adid was dying and was not told. Nobody defended it.

Reading change against the framework

Four things.

One, the contribution: the four mechanisms of structural change are not alternatives to be selected between. In a long collapse they run in sequence, and the order is fixed — fracture, then exhaustion, then repricing at the apex, then conquest by a rival elite. And the conquest comes last and comes by invitation.

The collection's account holds that structural change comes from elite fracture, elite exhaustion, conquest by a rival elite, or elite overproduction. This case runs all of them and shows they are stages rather than options.

Fracture came first, in 1062, when corps built as substitutes turned on each other over a shrinking payroll. Exhaustion followed as the treasury emptied and the provinces went. Repricing came in 1073, when an apex that could not be deposed decided that keeping the government was worth less than surviving without it, and wrote a letter. And conquest came ninety-six years after that, at the end, and it was not a conquest: it was three expeditions, every one of them requested by a faction inside the arrangement that was losing an internal fight, plus a Frankish invasion provoked by a vizier who stopped paying.

State it for testing elsewhere: **conquest by a rival elite is rarely the first mechanism and rarely uninvited. It is the terminal stage of the other three, and the door is opened from inside by a faction that is losing.** A hierarchy that has fractured and exhausted itself manufactures men whose only route to winning an internal contest is somebody else's army — and once such a man exists, the rival elite does not need to conquer anything. It needs only to accept an invitation and outlive the man who sent it.

The corollary is a warning to anyone reading a collapse from the outside: **the arrival of a foreign army is usually the last event in the causal chain and almost never the first, and treating it as the cause mistakes the undertaker for the disease.**

Two: popular violence is real, is sometimes very large, and functions as an input to elite repricing rather than as a cause of structural change — and the two roles are distinguishable by timing.

The 1016 rising in Ifriqiya destroyed the Fatimid palace city and killed a great many people, and changed nothing. What changed the arrangement was one man switching the name in the sermon somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-five years later, under pressure that the rising had helped to build. The Cairo mob killed a vizier in 1164 after his defeat had already been settled by an army from Syria.

So the diagnostic: **when popular violence appears in an account of a collapse, establish what it decided.** It will normally turn out to have executed a decision taken

elsewhere, or to have supplied a pressure that an office-holder cashed at a time of his choosing. The moment of structural change will be found in a decision by someone holding troops, a charter or an office.

Three: the law survives the case that looks hardest, and what the case actually exposes is a fault in the vocabulary rather than a fault in the law.

The Hilalian invasion is the episode in this study most likely to be offered as mass action producing structural change. It is nothing of the kind. It is a confederation with named emirs and a cavalry arm, licensed by one government to make war on another, winning a pitched battle at odds of ten to one because trained horsemen beat levies. Nothing in it requires the law to be qualified.

What the episode does expose is a trap in the language, and the trap is general. A great deal of historical vocabulary describes armed interests in words that suggest populations: *tribe*, *migration*, *the Bedouin*, *the horde*, *the mob*, *the men of* some place. Ibn Khaldun's image of the Hilalis as a swarm of locusts, which governed the older literature, is the extreme version — it converts a military campaign into a natural phenomenon and removes the commanders from the picture entirely. Run the same substitution in reverse and the confusion disappears: an army arrived, with emirs, and beat another army.

So the law is best stated in its operative form, unamended: **structural change comes from groups capable of independent organised force. Whether such a group is noble, tribal, servile or foreign is irrelevant; slave regiments and nomad confederations qualify, and landed aristocracies sometimes do not. The tilled and the workshop-bound do not qualify — not for want of grievance or of number, but because a functioning apparatus beats them and they cannot build one of their own.**

And the instruction that follows is about reading rather than about power: **whenever a source describes a population doing something that only an army can do, look for the commanders. They will be there, and they will usually be named.**

The Fatimid record contains a controlled demonstration inside a single century. A cavalry confederation unmade a state in Ifriqiya. Slave regiments unmade one in Egypt. And the cultivators of both provinces — starving, assessed collectively, chased by officials the register calls beast-chasers, and in Egypt reduced to eating dogs — unmade nothing at all.

Four, a smaller point that compounds the module on the settlement: an order that pays its army in cash converts every territorial loss directly into an internal fight, with no interval.

Sicily, Ifriqiya, Sijilmasa, Syria and Jerusalem were each, among other things, a line of revenue. Under a system of land assignments their loss would have dispossessed the particular men holding assignments there and left everyone else's position intact. Under a system of central cash payment, every loss anywhere shrank the single pot that every corps in Cairo was drawing on, and therefore raised the temperature of a competition already running inside the capital's walls.

The empire's frontier and the capital's parade ground were connected by a direct fiscal wire, and the wire had no insulation.

A note on sources. The absence of any structural change produced by Egyptian cultivators, artisans or urban poor across the Fatimid period is a negative claim about the whole record, and negative claims of that kind cannot be proved. What can be said is that this study looked for such an episode, including in the crisis years when the apparatus was least capable of suppressing one, and found none reported; that the standard narrative accounts describe none; and that the last great Egyptian rural rising in the sources is the Delta revolt of 831, put down under al-Ma'mun, well before the Fatimid conquest. A reader who knows of a counter-example should hold this module's central claim accordingly.

The 1016 rising in Ifriqiya, the destruction of al-Mansuriya, and the massacre of Shi'is, follow the standard accounts. The figure of twenty thousand killed is a traditional number and is described as such. The dating of al-Mu'izz ibn Badis's transfer of allegiance to the Abbasids varies in the literature between about 1041 and 1051, with 1045 commonly given; the range is on the page. The reported Zirid tribute of a million gold dinars a year to Cairo reaches this study at second hand and is not relied on for anything.

The Hilalian migration — the movement from Upper Egypt through Cyrenaica about 1050, the battle at Haydaran on 14 April 1052, the fall of Qayrawan in 1057, and the Zirid withdrawal to Mahdia — follows the standard accounts. The figures of three thousand Hilali cavalry against thirty thousand Zirids are reported ones and are used only for the ratio's order of magnitude, not as counts. The composition of the Hilalian leadership — the sub-tribes Riyah, Athbaj, Zughba and Jusham, each under its own chiefs; Mu'nis ibn Yahya of the Riyah as the leading emir at the time of the move; and, in the following century, Muhriz ibn Ziyad, of a family of emirs, holding fortresses, besieged at Kelibia by George of Antioch in 1148, and put forward by the qadi of Tunis as a candidate to rule the city — is from the standard accounts and the reference literature, and is set out at some length in the text because an earlier draft of this module described the Hilalis as a movement of ordinary people and had to be corrected. That error is recorded in this study's corrections file rather than quietly

repaired. The characterisation of the Hilalian arrival as a catastrophe for North African agriculture derives from Ibn Khaldun and dominated the older literature; modern scholarship, including Michael Brett's, has substantially qualified it, and that qualification is on the page. This module uses only the political effect on the Zirid state, which is not disputed.

The military factionalism of 1062–1073, the sack of the palace in 1067, Nasir al-Dawla's blockade of the Delta, al-Mustansir's letter to Badr al-Jamali and Badr's condition, and the settlement of 1074–1078, are as established in the module on the default, from the standard accounts resting on al-Maqrizi and Ibn Muyassar. The Nizari schism of 1094 and Kutayfat's attempt of 1130 are likewise as established there.

The final sequence — Shawar's vizierate from December 1162, his expulsion by Dirgham and flight to Nur al-Din, Amalric's invasion of 1163 over unpaid tribute and Dirgham's breaking of the dams, Shirkuh's first expedition with Saladin in 1164, Dirgham's death at the hands of the Cairo crowd, Shawar's restoration and his alliance with Amalric, the joint siege of Shirkuh at Bilbeis, Shirkuh's second expedition in 1167, Amalric's sack of Bilbeis in 1168 and Shawar's burning of Fustat, Shirkuh's third expedition of December 1168 at the caliph's invitation, Shawar's arrest by Saladin and execution on the caliph's order in January 1169, Shirkuh's appointment as vizier and death on 23 March 1169, Saladin's succession as a compromise candidate among Shirkuh's emirs, the suppression of the black African regiments' revolt later that year, the conversion of the army to land assignments from 1169, and the *khuṭba* of 10 September 1171 — follows the standard accounts, principally Lyons and Jackson and the general histories of the period, and is paraphrased. The burning of Fustat is reported by the compilers and its extent is disputed; the city was not wholly destroyed and recovered in part, and no figure for casualties is offered here.

The territorial losses — Sicily to the Normans between 1061 and 1091, Ifriqiya after 1051, Syria progressively to the Seljuks, and Jerusalem to the Crusaders in July 1099 — follow the standard accounts. The observation that each loss shrank a single central pot rather than dispossessing particular assignees rests on the argument about cash payment made in the module on the settlement, which was flagged there as that module's most exposed claim and remains so here.

MODULE 11

The Granary Asked for Grain

The grim accounting — what the sword cost across two hundred and sixty-two years, what the river cost when the men who managed it were fighting each other, why a drought opened the door and a drought closed it, and who in this story had anything to forget.

What can be counted

Almost nothing, and the module has to begin by saying so.

There is no census, no muster roll, no burial register and no casualty return from any event in this study. Every number in the narrative sources is a compiler's number, most of them written centuries downstream, and the ones that look precise are usually the least trustworthy because precision is what a compiler reaches for when he wants to be believed. Twenty thousand Shi'is massacred in Ifriqiya in 1016; a hundred thousand men in Jawhar's army; thirty million dinars of goods sold in a fortnight; forty thousand starved in the great famine. Not one of those is a count. They are ways of writing *very many*.

So this accounting proceeds by episode, by mechanism and by direction, and gives figures only where they can be attributed and only with their provenance attached. What it can establish is where the violence fell, on whom, for how long, and — this is the part the numbers would obscure anyway — which kinds of violence produced no casualty figure at all because nobody fought.

The sword that made it

The founding violence of this order was done in the Maghrib, between 902 and 909, and then for forty years afterwards.

Seven years of campaigning up and down the old Roman roads: Mila, Sétif, Belezma, Tobna, Baghaya, Maydara, Constantine, the oasis towns of the Chott. A field battle at al-Aribus on 18 March 909, and on the following day the unconditional surrender of the town, its massacre and its looting. The extinction of the Ibadi imamate at Tahert, a hundred and thirty-three years old, on the march west. The execution of the man who had built the army, and his brother, in February 911.

Then the risings: Kutama commanders in the summoner's name, the Kutama country itself, the Zenata, the Sanhaja, the Arab notables who had done well under the

Aghlabids, the Berbers of the Nafusa, the towns of Tripolitania. Al-Mahdi's entire twenty-four-year reign was spent suppressing the province he had taken in seven years.

Then Abu Yazid, from 944 to 947: a war that ran across Ifriqiya, took Béja, Tébessa and Qayrawan, destroyed a Kutama army, and besieged the Fatimid caliph in Mahdia for the better part of a year while he died inside it.

Then, in 1016, the countervailing massacre: a rising in Ifriqiya that destroyed the palace city of al-Mansuriya and killed Shi'is in numbers the sources put at twenty thousand.

None of that can be totalled. What can be said is that the making of this order cost Ifriqiya four decades of intermittent war and one province-wide three-year war, and that the violence ran in both directions and did not stop when the dynasty left.

The country that cost almost nothing

And then there is Egypt, and the contrast is the most important single fact in this accounting.

Jawhar left Raqqada on 6 February 969. Alexandria was taken without a fight. He camped at Tarruja and waited. A delegation came out and asked for terms; he wrote them; they were granted. Between 29 June and 3 July the remaining Ikhshidid troops tried to hold the Nile crossing near Giza and were beaten. On 6 July he entered Fustat. On 9 July the sermon was read in his master's name.

One engagement at a river crossing. That is the recorded cost, in fighting, of transferring the richest country in the Mediterranean world from one dynasty to another.

Whatever else this study has said about the Fatimid order, that has to stand in the ledger without qualification. The conquest of Egypt was among the cheapest transfers of a major state in medieval history, and it was cheap because the conqueror narrowed his claim, offered guarantees, put them in writing, and waited for the notables to come to him.

The sword that held it

Holding was another matter, and it went on for two centuries.

The Qarmatians came south in the winter of 971 and were beaten off at Ayn Shams with the population of the capital called out; they came again in 974 and were beaten again, and the caliph's son rode into Cairo under the parasol with prisoners on camels and heads on lances. Syria was fought over continuously from 970 to the end — taken,

lost, retaken, contested against Qarmatians, Bedouin, Byzantines, Turkomans, Seljuks and finally Franks.

Inside Egypt: al-Hakim's decrees, from 1004 to about 1012, which dismissed officials, closed monasteries, restricted worship and in 1009 destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The suppression of the Druze preaching. The wars of the corps from 1062 to 1073 — Cairo fought over, the palace sacked in 1067, the Delta blockaded and the capital's food cut off. Badr al-Jamali's first night in January 1074, when his officers went through the city killing the leading generals and officials.

Then the Frankish wars: the loss of Jerusalem in July 1099 to a Crusader assault whose massacre is among the best-attested atrocities of the century; Bilbeis sacked by Amalric in 1168; and Fustat — the old capital of Muslim Egypt, a city that had stood since 641 — burned by its own vizier to deny it to the ally he had invited in four years earlier. And in 1169 the black African regiments, rising against the new vizier, put down by Syrian troops.

The order was taken in five months and held for two hundred and two years, and the holding cost incomparably more than the taking.

The sword that leaves no battle

And now the part of the accounting that no casualty figure will ever capture, because it produced no casualties in the sense the sources record.

For six centuries, under this dynasty and the ones before and after it, an annual or periodic delivery of enslaved people came down the Nile from Nubia by treaty. Three hundred and sixty a year is the reported figure; the number is calendrical in form and should be read as a convention rather than a count; the arrangement was renegotiated, sometimes lapsed, and was at one point reduced to a delivery every three years. The Nubians largely obtained them by raiding further south, which moves the violence out of the record altogether — a raid on a people with no chronicler leaves nothing at all.

Alongside that ran the trans-Saharan caravans, whose principal cargoes were gold and people, and whose losses in the crossing nobody recorded. And in the Eastern Desert, in the workings of Wadi Allaqi, gold and emeralds were dug and washed by chattel slaves through the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, with the early Arab peak in the tenth and eleventh — which is to say, through this dynasty. The archaeology survives: the fortified settlements, the inclined washing tables, the tailings, the rotary querns. No text records how many men died on those tables.

And the army itself: nine corps, of which at least four were raised by purchase. Every soldier in the *'abīd al-shirā'*, the *ustādh* and the Zanj represents a transaction, a journey and an origin, and none of those appear in any battle account.

So the sword in this ledger has two edges and only one of them shows. There are the wars, which the compilers count badly. And there is a continuous, structural, entirely peaceful extraction of human beings, running for the whole life of the order, which produced no engagement, no siege, no date and no number — and which supplied the men who dug the gold that made the coin that carried the dynasty's claim to be the rightful interpreter of God's law into every market between Córdoba and the Malabar coast.

The note

Now the other column, and Egypt is the case for which the concept exists.

The Nile valley carries a population far above what the land would support unmanaged, and it does so by three things: the annual flood, the canals and dykes that lead the water onto the fields and hold it there, and the coordination that clears the canals and repairs the dykes every year before the water comes. The first is nature. The second and third are an apparatus, and the apparatus has to work annually, on a schedule, or the crop fails whatever the river does.

That is a metabolic loan. It lifts the population above the land's unmanaged capacity, and the interest is paid in the requirement that the coordination never stop.

The flood series makes the pressure visible, and it is the best non-narrative source this study has. The readings taken twice a year at the Rawda gauge, preserved and compiled by Toussoun and made usable for climatology by Popper, show that from about 930 to 1070 the Nile was dominated by catastrophically low floods, and that from about 1070 to 1180 the pattern reversed to disastrously high ones. Within the low episode, one modern count finds eleven inadequate floods in the twenty years from 1052, and identifies two acute drought clusters: 963 to 969, and 1065 to 1072.

Hold those two clusters. They are the two ends of this study.

Egypt survived a great many low floods across the period, and the survivals are as instructive as the failure. In 1054 the flood was inadequate; the Fatimid government, expecting the previous harvest's stores to run out, wrote to the Byzantine emperor Constantine Monomachos and asked for grain, and the emperor agreed to send it.

That transaction is the metabolic account rendered in one line. Egypt had been the granary of Rome and then of Constantinople; under Justinian it had shipped grain north by the ten thousand tons. In 1054 it was asking Constantinople to ship grain south, and the quantity agreed would have fed a fraction of one city for a year.

And it worked. The point of the 1054 episode is that the system absorbed the shock, because there was a government to notice the shortfall coming, a chancery to write the letter, a fleet to carry the cargo and a bureaucracy to distribute it.

Eleven years later the shock came again, larger, and the apparatus was fighting itself.

From about 1065 the floods failed repeatedly. The corps were already at each other's throats over a shrinking payroll; in 1067 the Turks took Cairo and stripped the palace and the treasury; in 1069 a general who had been the caliph's own commander took the Delta and cut off the capital's grain. There was no functioning government to write to Constantinople, no treasury to buy with, and no coordination to clear a canal. Prices went past reach. The compilers report cannibalism, the eating of dogs until there were none, and the depopulation of al-Askar and al-Qata'i and much of Fustat. A merchant wrote from Alexandria that a man who went out of the gate was eaten and a man who stayed in starved.

The note was called, and this is the point: **it was not called by the shortfall.** Shortfalls had come every few years for a century and had been absorbed. It was called by the coincidence of a shortfall with a coordination failure — and the coordination failure was produced by armed men fighting over money, which is to say by the mechanism described three modules earlier.

The door the drought opened

Which brings the accounting back to its own beginning, and to a fact this study should have seen earlier than it did.

The other acute drought cluster in the record is 963 to 969.

Set that against what the first module established about the conquest. Three Fatimid invasions of Egypt had failed — in 914–15, in 919–21, and in the 930s — every one of them taking Alexandria easily and then breaking against a defended Fustat. The fourth succeeded in five months with one engagement, and the reason given there was political: Kafur dead in April 968, the vizier arresting his rivals, the army factions turning on each other, the revenue not moving, and famine in the villages.

The famine was not incidental to that list. It was underneath it. Egypt was ungovernable in 968 because a state whose entire fiscal system is a function of the flood had been running on inadequate floods for five years, and a government that cannot pay cannot hold an army together, and an army that is not paid fights itself. What the fourth expedition met was not a weak dynasty; it was a dynasty in the fifth year of a drought.

So the same climatic episode that made the conquest cheap in 969 made the collapse total in 1065. The Fatimids entered Egypt through a door a drought had opened and lost the government of it when the same epoch's last cluster arrived and found the army already fighting.

That does not make the conquest a weather event, and this study is not offering a climatic explanation of Fatimid history. Al-Mu'izz still had to have an army, a general, a fleet, a stockpile and a document; the notables still had to ride out to Tarruja and ask for terms. But the position each of those men occupied in 968 had been made by five years of low water, and reading their decisions without that fact underneath is reading them short.

Who forgot, and who did not

The last part of the accounting concerns memory, and the Fatimid case does something unusual with it.

The framework's expectation is that a built order becomes, over generations, the furniture of reality, and that the violence which made it is forgotten by the people living inside it. This order presents the mechanism in an odd form, because in Egypt there was almost nothing to forget.

The founding violence had been done sixty years earlier, fifteen hundred miles away, in another country, by Berbers to Berbers and to the Arab towns of Ifriqiya. Egypt was bought with a written guarantee and one fight at a river crossing. Within a generation there was no Egyptian family with a grievance from 969, because there was nothing to have a grievance about — the schools stood, the mosques were maintained and staffed out of the treasury, the courts sat, and the name in the Friday sermon had changed. Seventy-eight years later a Persian traveller found money-changers leaving their shops closed with a net.

That is not forgetting. It is a conquest whose founding violence was performed elsewhere, on other people, before it arrived — and which therefore needed no forgetting in the place it ruled.

And the test of that reading is what happened where the violence *had* been done. Al-Aribus was stormed and massacred in March 909; in August 944 the same town, negotiating its surrender to Abu Yazid's rebels, wrote Fatimid officials and adherents of Ismailism out of the protection of its safe-conduct. Ifriqiya massacred Shi'is in 1016 and its emir switched the sermon to Baghdad within thirty-five years. The memory held, precisely and vindictively, exactly where the sword had fallen, and nowhere else.

Reading the accounting against the framework

Four things.

One, the contribution: the metabolic note is not called by the size of the shock. It is called by the state of the coordinating apparatus at the moment the shock

arrives — and the apparatus is normally disabled by the elite fighting described elsewhere in this collection, which means the metabolic column and the sword column are not independent.

Egypt met inadequate floods repeatedly across the whole low-Nile epoch and absorbed them. In 1054 the government saw the shortfall coming, wrote to a foreign emperor, and got grain. That is a functioning apparatus converting a potential catastrophe into a difficult year, and it is what such an apparatus is *for*.

In 1065 the shock was larger, but the decisive difference was not its size. It was that the army was fighting over a shrinking payroll, the treasury had been stripped by its own troops, the Delta was blockaded by a former Fatimid commander, and there was nobody to write the letter. The same river, the same fields, the same population, the same technology — and cannibalism in the sources.

State it for testing elsewhere: **to price the metabolic debt of an intensive agricultural order, do not measure the environmental shock. Measure the condition of the coordinating apparatus when it lands.** The same shortfall is a hard year under a working government and a demographic catastrophe under a fracturing one, and the difference between those two outcomes is not natural at all. It is the elite fight, expressed in deaths among people who had no part in it.

Which gives the accounting its most uncomfortable line: **the men who broke the coordination were paid in silver and the note was settled in the villages.**

Two, and this reaches back into the study's own earlier work: the same climatic episode that made the conquest cheap made the collapse total, and the first module read 968 without it.

The Fatimids failed three times against a defended Fustat and succeeded at the fourth attempt in five months. The first module attributed the difference to the disappearance of Abbasid relief and to the Egyptian political collapse after Kafur's death, and both are true. Underneath both was a drought cluster running from 963 to 969 in a state whose revenue is a direct function of the flood.

The general point is one about reading positions: **when a state's fiscal base is a natural variable, the political events at any moment are downstream of that variable by one or two years, and a position reconstructed without it will look like a failure of men where it was a failure of water — or, worse, like a triumph of generalship where it was a purchase made in a buyer's market.**

The honest form of the first module's finding therefore reads: a conqueror who narrows his claim buys a country at a discount, *and the discount is deepest when the seller is in the fifth year of a drought*.

Three: the sword's largest work in this order left no battle in the record, because nobody fought.

Every organised campaign of two and a half centuries can be listed, and this module has listed them. What cannot be listed, and what almost certainly outweighs them in human terms, is the continuous acquisition of people: the treaty deliveries from Nubia across six hundred years, the caravans across the Sahara, the slave markets that supplied at least four of the nine corps, and the men who died on the washing tables of Wadi Allaqi so that the purest coin in the world could be struck.

None of it produced an engagement, a date, a siege or a figure. All of it was legal, routine, administered, and recorded — where recorded at all — as revenue.

The instruction is a warning about the shape of evidence: **an accounting built from battles will systematically undercount orders whose principal violence was administrative, and the more efficient and peaceable an order's extraction of persons, the less of it will appear in any ledger of violence.** The absence of an atrocity in the record is not evidence of its absence; in a well-run state it is what success looks like.

Four: the forgetting is local. An order is remembered as violent precisely where the violence was done, and a conquest bought rather than fought is the furniture of reality from the first generation.

Egypt had no founding trauma to forget because its conquest cost one fight at a river crossing and a written guarantee. Ifriqiya, where the same order had been made by seven years of siege work and forty of suppression, remembered with precision: a town massacred in 909 wrote the ruler's confession out of its surrender terms in 944, and the province transferred its allegiance to Baghdad within a lifetime.

So the naturalisation the framework expects to take generations can sometimes be had immediately, and its price is the price of a document. That is a real finding and it should be stated with its edge showing: **a conqueror who buys a country instead of storming it is not merely saving lives. He is purchasing immunity from memory, and the immunity is granted by the people he did not have to kill.**

Whether that is a mitigation or an aggravation of what he then does with the country is not a question this study will answer. Both columns stand.

A note on sources. The figures rejected in the opening section — twenty thousand killed in Ifriqiya in 1016, a hundred thousand in Jawhar's army, thirty million dinars in a fortnight of 1068, forty thousand dead in the great famine — appear in the compilers and in the modern reference literature respectively, and are named here only so that a reader meeting them elsewhere knows they were examined and set aside. None is used.

The Ifriqiyan campaign, the storming of al-Aribus, the extinction of the Rustamid imamate, the execution of Abu Abdallah, the risings of al-Mahdi's reign, and Abu Yazid's revolt of 944–947 are as established in the first module. The Egyptian conquest sequence is as established there. The Qarmatian invasions, al-Hakim's decrees, the corps wars of 1062–1073, Badr al-Jamali's first night, the loss of Jerusalem in 1099, Amalric's sack of Bilbeis in 1168, Shawar's burning of Fustat and the suppression of the black African regiments in 1169 are as established in the modules on information, the default and collapse. The extent of the destruction of Fustat is disputed; the city was not wholly destroyed and partly recovered, and no casualty figure is offered.

The *baqt*, the Wadi Allaqi workings and their archaeology, and the purchased composition of the corps are as established in the module on extraction, with the same caveats: no original of the treaty survives, the figure of 360 is calendrical in form, and no estimate of output or mortality at the mines exists that this study would rely on.

The Nile flood series is Toussoun's compilation of the Rawda readings (1925), made usable for climatological work by Popper, and the characterisation of AD 930–1070 as an episode dominated by catastrophically low floods and 1070–1180 as one of extreme high floods follows Fekri Hassan's published analyses of that series and the related work in *Science*. The identification of acute drought clusters at 963–969 and 1065–1072, and the count of eleven inadequate floods in the twenty years from 1052, are from the modern historical-climatological literature and are paraphrased and credited. The Rawda readings have known problems of datum, of transmission and of possible administrative adjustment, and the argument here uses their long-run pattern rather than individual years.

The 1054 appeal to Constantine Monomachos and his agreement to ship grain is from the modern scholarship on climate and society in the eleventh-century eastern Mediterranean, drawing on the Arabic sources and on Bianquis and Halm. The quantity is given there as 400,000 *ardabbs*, glossed as about 2,700 tons and as sufficient for some ten thousand people for a year. Those figures do not reconcile: on any standard value of the *ardabb*, 400,000 of them is an order of magnitude more than 2,700 tons. The discrepancy is flagged rather than resolved, and the module's argument uses only the direction of the shipment and the fact that it was requested and agreed, neither of which depends on the quantity.

The argument that the drought cluster of 963–969 is causally underneath the political collapse that made the 969 conquest cheap is this study's inference. The climatological literature establishes the drought; the narrative sources establish the political collapse and mention famine among its features; no source draws the connection in the form given here, and the first module did not draw it either, which is

why the correction is stated in the text and entered in this study's corrections file rather than silently absorbed. A reader who thinks the political causes are sufficient on their own is entitled to that view; what is claimed here is that the drought is the more fundamental of the two and that omitting it shortens the reading.

The account of memory in al-Aribus and Ifriqiya rests on the safe-conduct of 7 August 944 and on the Zirid transfer of allegiance, both as established earlier, with the same flag on the first: it rests on a single reported document.

MODULE 12

Two Caliphs in Cages

Convergence and divergence — what this order shares with the rest of the collection, the one thing it shows that nothing else does, and the strongest case that can be made for it, answered.

Where it runs with everything else

Most of what this study found was not new, and saying so is the point of a comparative module.

An armed group took a country and paid itself out of it. It distributed ground, offices and stipends, and the men who received them defended the whole arrangement by defending their own positions. It taxed a population that could not refuse and could not leave, and priced compliance high enough that compliance was rational. It told a story about why it was entitled to rule, and aimed that story at its competitor rather than at its subjects. It suppressed what it could reach. It fractured at the top when the money ran out, was rescued by a soldier, and ended when a rival hierarchy accepted an invitation from a faction that was losing.

None of that would surprise anyone who had read the other studies in this collection. The Fatimid order sits comfortably inside the general account: a floor of force, a settlement, a robe, a cost column, a default, and a collapse that came from the hierarchy and not from below. Where this study earned its place is in four particulars, and the first of them is a convergence so exact that it is worth setting out at length.

Two Caliphs in cages

In the middle of the eleventh century both caliphates of the Islamic world independently arrived at the same constitutional device, within twenty years of each other, and both were preserved by it for as long as they lasted.

The collection's study of the Seljuks and the Abbasid caliphate established the Baghdad half. By 1055 the Abbasid caliph had no soldiers, no revenue and a stipend a general could stop; every fact about his position that reads as humiliation was what made him usable, because a source of title that can enforce its own decrees cannot be presumed to have issued them disinterestedly. That study's finding was blunt: **the soundness of a source of title is inversely related to its capacity to enforce**, and a source that acquires a floor converts itself into a claimant and forfeits its immunity. Its confirmation was equally blunt — the Abbasid caliphate was physically untouchable

for two centuries while harmless, and within seventeen years of raising an army one caliph was beaten in the field by his own sultan and killed, in 1135, and his successor deposed.

Now the Cairo half, arrived at from the opposite direction and by men who had never read a word of Baghdad's constitutional theory.

In 1073 al-Mustansir, whose palace had been stripped by his own troops, wrote to an Armenian commander at Acre and accepted his condition. Badr al-Jamali landed, killed the leading generals on his first night, and took the vizierate with plenipotentiary powers, the command of the armies, and the headship of the religious mission. In 1078 the caliph formally made over all affairs of state to him. Badr married a daughter to him and had his own son designated to succeed himself.

What Badr did not take, and could not have taken, and never attempted, was the Imamate.

And here is the convergence stated exactly. Both offices survived because they had stopped governing. In neither case did the strongman abolish the office he ruled through, and in both cases the reason was the same arithmetic: he could not hold it himself, so abolishing it would have converted a source of his own legitimacy into a vacancy that a rival might fill; keeping it cost an income and a ceremonial; and an office nobody could occupy was an office no opponent could raise against him.

The Abbasid caliphate lasted from the Buyid capture of 945 to the Mongols in 1258 — three hundred and thirteen years of not governing. The Fatimid Imamate lasted from 1073 to 1171 — ninety-eight. The difference in duration is a difference in what happened outside the palace, not inside it.

So the finding this study offered in its module on the default can now be stated in the general form the two cases jointly support: **an office nobody can take is a liability while it must govern and an asset once it need not.** The al-Andalus study found the unobtainable office fatal, and was right about a caliphate that was still expected to rule. The variable is not whether the office is unobtainable. It is whether the governing function has been split off into an office that is.

That the two great rival caliphates of Islam, denouncing each other as frauds, made the same discovery within a generation and neither borrowed it from the other, is the strongest evidence in this collection that the device is structural rather than cultural.

The other half of the 1011 document

A second convergence, and it is one where this study can be checked against work already done from the other side.

The Christendom sequence in this collection, examining how sources of title are attacked, catalogued the ways they fail — capture, compulsion, purchase, starvation, hollowing, expenditure, forking, divorce, revocation — and established that **a manufactured authority fails where the manufacture is visible**, so that the counter-move against a constructed rival is not to out-argue it but to show the seam. That sequence cited, as its example of the move, al-Qadir's Baghdad assembly of 1011 declaring the Fatimid genealogy fraudulent.

This study reached the same document from inside the party it was aimed at, and the two readings fit without strain. The manifesto's substance is genealogy and not doctrine; it needed the signatures of Alid sharifs, because ordinary jurists could pronounce a man a heretic and only the Prophet's family could pronounce that he was not the Prophet's family; and three years later the same Baghdad government licensed the Ashura mourning in the Karkh quarter. The Abbasid caliph was not attacking a doctrine. He was showing a seam.

What this study adds from the Cairo side is the receipt. Al-Qadir issued it the year after an Uqaylid amir at Mosul switched his Friday sermon and his coinage to al-Hakim, and two years after the Shi'a of Baghdad had used al-Hakim's name as a street slogan. A counter-claim is a measure of the effectiveness of the claim it answers, made by the party best placed to know and least inclined to flatter.

And the al-Andalus check the seed of this study asked for comes out as predicted, though for reasons the seed did not give. Córdoba took the caliphal title in 929, twenty years after the Sijilmasa proclamation, and the two gold coinages do alternate with control of the caravan terminus: Jawhar's expedition of 958 put Fatimid dies into the Sijilmasa mint eleven years before he crossed the Nile. The connection is metallurgical and numismatic and it holds. What it is not is a story about doctrine. Two caliphates were competing for the same gold, and the titles followed the metal at least as reliably as the metal followed the titles.

What nothing else in the collection shows

Now the divergence, and it is the reason this case had to be done.

Every other order in this collection either formed its population or failed to form it for reasons of cost, policy or contempt. A British administration in Kenya declined to form Kenyans as Englishmen because forming them would have admitted them and admission confers claims; that was a decision, and it could have gone the other way. A conquering Islam in al-Andalus formed the population thoroughly, because conversion was a door anyone could walk through and the elementary school was open to everybody who came in.

Fatimid Egypt is the only case here of an order that **could not** form its subjects, whatever it wanted, because its own doctrine forbade the operation.

The content of Isma'ili teaching was not a set of propositions to be handed over. It was an ascent, released in stages, to men judged ready, under an oath of secrecy, on texts the Imam approved before delivery, in a hall of his palace. The sessions of wisdom had parallel courses for the great, for officials, for palace women, for the general public, for public women — and for foreign visitors passing through the country. There was no course for the Egyptian village, and there could not have been, because a secret taught to five-year-olds in a village school is not a secret and a doctrine of graded initiation cannot be installed wholesale before the age of reason.

So the order that possessed the best-funded intellectual establishment of its century — a House of Knowledge open to the public, a library foreigners travelled to see, Ibn al-Haytham on the payroll, a complete code of law written by its own chief judge — built no elementary schools of its own, and the Egyptian child went on learning his letters where he had learned them for three hundred years, in a room the dynasty had guaranteed in writing not to touch.

The result was not gradual. Isma'ilism disappeared from Egypt completely after 1171, in the one country where it had held the treasury, the mosque, the courts and the schools for two centuries. And it survived permanently in Persia, Syria, Yemen and Gujarat — four places where it never had a state, never had a payroll, and was frequently hunted, and where the missionaries therefore had to build households, and households make children.

That is the divergence, and it yields the proposition this study most wants carried forward: **esotericism and mass formation are alternatives, and an order may have exactly one.** The more intellectually serious and prestigious a ruling doctrine's apparatus, the likelier it is to be structurally incapable of forming a population, because sophistication in doctrine tends toward graded access and graded access is the opposite of formation.

The fork

A third divergence, which the Christendom sequence had already anticipated without knowing it.

That sequence sorted credentials by where they live — in an office, which can be captured; in a person, which cannot be captured and equally cannot be committed or repaired; or in a family, which is predictable, uncapturable, and hostage to biology. And it named a distinct failure mode, **forking**: an authorisation is a statement that something is uniquely so, and a statement available from two independent sources is

only a statement about which source you asked. A source of title's authority is not divisible; it is destructible, and dividing it is how you destroy it.

The Fatimid Imamate was a family credential with an institutional transmission — descent plus explicit designation — and it therefore carried both vulnerabilities at once. It was hostage to biology, which meant that a caliph with two adult sons was a constitutional crisis waiting on a death. And it was designated, which meant that somebody had to say who.

In 1094 the vizier said. Al-Afdal, who had inherited the office from his father and had a sister married to the younger son, set aside al-Mustansir's designated heir and installed the younger. The entire value of the Imamate — to the believer, to the missionary, and above all to the vizier ruling in its name — had been that it stood outside human choice. The instant a man made the choice, it was inside; and the movement forked, and Hasan-i Sabbah took the Persian mission to Nizar's line and never acknowledged Cairo again.

Which supplies the rule for any arrangement that has split the sacred office from the governing one: **the governing office must not be able to fill the sacred one.** If it can, it will, and the act destroys the value it was preserving. Baghdad's arrangement survived three centuries partly because Abbasid succession ran on a rule the sultans manipulated but did not own outright. Cairo's ran on designation, and designation is a decision, and decisions can be bought.

The strongest case for this order

The last thing this study owes is the counter-position, stated fully, in its own voice, without the hedges a hostile writer inserts to keep his balance.

For two hundred years Cairo was the best-governed, richest, most learned and most tolerant city in the Mediterranean world, and this is not a matter of opinion but of comparison with the alternatives available at the time.

Consider what a Jew or a Christian could be there. Ya'qub ibn Killis, born a Jew in Baghdad, founded the Fatimid vizierate and ran the state for fourteen years. Karaite grandees held high office and were petitioned by the Rabbanite leadership for intercession at court. Bahram al-Armani served as vizier of the caliphate while remaining a Christian. The Coptic church elected its own patriarch without state interference and administered its own law across a population that may still have been the majority of Egypt. In the same century, Latin Christendom produced the Rhineland massacres of 1096 and the sack of Jerusalem in 1099, in which a Crusading army killed the inhabitants of a city it had taken from a Fatimid garrison. There was no country in

Christendom in which a Jew could hold what a Jew held in Cairo, and there would not be for eight hundred years.

Consider the learning. Al-Azhar founded within a year of the conquest; the House of Knowledge founded in 1005 with a library that drew scholars across the world and access open to the public; an astronomical table commissioned by the caliph; and Ibn al-Haytham, who in Cairo wrote the book that established that vision works by light entering the eye and that established the experimental method for how one would know.

Consider the money. The Fatimid dinar was the most trusted coin in the world for two centuries, taken unassayed from Córdoba to the Malabar coast, and the trust was earned by a fineness the mint never debased. The India trade moved from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea in these years and made Fustat the hinge of a commercial world running from Spain to Gujarat.

Consider the peace. A Persian traveller with no reason to flatter recorded that the money-changers and jewellers of Fustat did not close their shop doors, stretching a net across the front, and that nobody dared steal. He recorded that the sultan's officials paid for the oil, matting, carpets and staff of the mosques in every town and village from Syria to Qayrawan — Sunni mosques, maintained out of a Shi'i caliph's treasury, eighty years after a conquest. He recorded that no soldier held a claim on any taxpayer. He recorded medicines given to anyone who asked and never refused.

Consider the conquest itself. Egypt changed hands in five months with one engagement at a river crossing, because the conqueror wrote down what he would guarantee and then kept every clause of it for two hundred and two years — the legal schools, the call to prayer, the fast, the mosques, the pilgrimage, the protected communities. How many conquests in this collection can that be said of?

And consider that the tradition's own literature, recovered from Yemen and India in the twentieth century, shows a serious philosophical and legal enterprise, not the debauched heresy of the Baghdad manifesto — which was, after all, a political document signed under pressure by men whose caliph had just watched an amir defect.

That is the case, and almost every sentence of it is true.

The answer

The answer is not that the case is false. It is that it is a description of some people's experience of a system, offered as a description of the system.

The gold that made the coin whose purity the case rightly admires was dug and washed, in part, by chattel slaves in the workings of Wadi Allaqi, where the archaeology survives — the fortified settlements, the inclined washing tables, the tailings, the rotary

querns — and where nobody counted the dead. The other part came up the Sahara on caravans whose second cargo was people.

The army that kept the peace the traveller admired was raised by purchase. Of the nine corps he watched parade, at least four were composed of bought men; and one of the supply lines had been running for six centuries, by treaty, delivering enslaved people north from Nubia — obtained by the Nubians in raids on populations further south who left no record of any kind.

The tolerance was real and it was not a principle. It was arbitration. The state had to confirm the head of every community, so every faction had to come to court, and an arbiter's power depends on there continuing to be parties; a sovereign who lets one faction destroy another has fewer clients and no more authority. Which is why it was robust, and also why it was owned by nobody: in 1004 one man withdrew it, and Christians were dismissed from the bureaux, monasteries were closed, festivals were banned, and in 1009 the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was pulled down. In 1012 the same man began giving it back. Nobody could prevent either.

The learning was for initiates and for export. The House of Knowledge trained missionaries for countries the state did not rule. The sessions that taught what the order actually believed were held inside the palace, on texts the Imam approved, for men who had sworn an oath — with a course laid on for foreign visitors and none for the Egyptian village. And after 1171 the doctrine vanished from Egypt without trace, having formed nobody there in two centuries.

The peace that let a Jewish jeweller keep three hundred silver tubs of fruit trees on his roof did not stop the sultan's soldiers from murdering him in the street. Twenty thousand of them then rode out in fear, admitted the crime aloud, and were told to go home. Nobody was punished. And when his brother offered the treasury two hundred thousand dinars out of terror, the caliph tore the letter up in public and issued safe-conducts — because the state could enforce against a merchant and could not enforce against its own army, and so gave the guarantee it could keep and withheld the one it could not.

And in the 1060s the whole apparatus failed at once. The floods went, the corps fought each other over a shrinking payroll, the palace was stripped, a former Fatimid commander cut the capital's grain off, the library the case admires was torn up for kindling, and people ate dogs and then, the compilers say, each other.

The two columns

Here is what must not be done with those two lists, and why.

The temptation is to weigh them — to decide whether Fatimid Egypt was, on balance, a good order or a bad one, and to reach a verdict proportioned to the sums. Both the admiring literature and the hostile literature do this. They reach opposite verdicts by the identical operation, and the operation is the error, not the verdict.

The people in the two columns are not the same people.

The merchant who left his shop closed with a net was not the man on the washing table at Wadi Allaqi. The Karaite courtier petitioned for intercession at the palace was not the boy delivered north under the *baqt*. Ibn al-Haytham was not the cultivator in the Fayyum whose poll tax was collected by officials the government's own register calls beast-chasers. The scholar in the House of Knowledge was not the Coptic villager whose year was set by a gauge on an island he had never seen.

Adding a merchant's security to a slave's mortality and dividing produces a number that describes nobody who ever lived. It is not a summary of the order; it is an average of incommensurable lives, and its only function is to let a reader stop thinking.

And the columns are not even independent, which is the part both readings miss. The purity of the coin and the labour on the washing tables are not two facts to be balanced. They are one operation seen from its two ends: the metal passed physically from the second to the first. The peace the traveller admired and the army that produced it are one arrangement, and the army was bought. The learning and the failure to form anybody are one doctrine, and the same feature produced both.

So the honest output of a study like this is not a verdict. It is a distribution — a statement of who was in which column, how they got there, and by what mechanism one column paid for the other.

Reading convergence against the framework

Three things, and then the closing.

One: the device of separating the sacred office from the governing office is structural rather than cultural, and this collection now has it independently arrived at twice in one generation by two orders that were denouncing each other as frauds. Baghdad, reduced by the Buyids in 945 and formalised under the Seljuks after 1055; Cairo, in the settlement of 1073 to 1078. Neither borrowed it. Both were preserved by it — one for three centuries, one for one. The finding, in its now-general form: an office nobody can take is a liability while it must govern and an asset once it need not, and the men who preserve such an office are exactly the men it excludes.

Two: the collection's catalogue of ways a source of title fails now has a case where the fork was performed by the office's own protector. The Christendom sequence established that forking destroys an authorisation because a statement

available from two independent sources is only a statement about which source you asked, and that a source of title's authority is not divisible but destructible. Cairo in 1094 supplies the mechanism by which a forking becomes available: **wherever the sacred office is filled by designation and the governing office has the power to designate, the fork is not a risk but a scheduled event, waiting only on a caliph with two sons.** A hereditary credential is hostage to biology; a designated one is hostage to whoever holds the pen; the Fatimid Imamate was both, and it was broken by its own vizier in the year the vizier inherited his own office.

Three, and it is this study's principal contribution: an order can be structurally incapable of forming its subjects, independently of anything it wants. The collection's account of withheld formation has been an account of choices — of rulers declining to form the governed because forming them would admit them. This case adds a second cause that is not a choice at all: a ruling doctrine whose content is graded release under oath cannot be installed in children without ceasing to be that doctrine. And the diagnostic is cheap and general: **look for the elementary school**, not the library, not the college, not the size of the scholarly payroll. An order with the finest library in the world and no infant schools has built a seminary and not a formation apparatus, and its doctrine will not survive its own funding.

The last thing

Two hundred and sixty-two years after a missionary's Berber cavalry stormed a town in the Tunisian hills, and two hundred and two after a delegation of five men rode out to a camp in the Delta and asked for terms in writing, a Kurdish vizier changed a name in a Friday sermon and the last Imam of the age died in his palace a few days later without being told.

Nobody defended it. The corps that might have were somebody else's now, or dead, or waiting to be crushed later that year. The population that might have had never been asked to believe anything and had not. The men who had been guaranteed everything and given nothing kept their courts, their schools and their Friday prayer, and moved into the space, and are there still.

What the order left is a mosque that became the intellectual centre of the confession it was built to supersede, three gates in a wall, a coin in museums, a calendar that was never its own, a body of law preserved by exiles in Yemen and India, and a grievance about a succession in 632 that is still performed annually across a quarter of the world.

Its founding claim had been that the arrangement everybody took for reality was in fact a theft, dating from a particular year. It ended by having its own arrangement taken, in a particular year, by men who did not bother to argue with it.

A note on sources. This module makes no new factual claims and introduces no new evidence; everything in it is established in the preceding modules, with the caveats recorded there. Where it draws on other studies in this collection it says so.

The Abbasid material — the caliphate's reduction under the Buyids from 945 and under the Seljuks after 1055, the proposition that the soundness of a source of title is inversely related to its capacity to enforce, and the confirmation in the defeat and killing of a caliph by his own sultan in 1135 — is from this collection's study of the Seljuks and the Abbasid caliphate, and is credited to it rather than independently verified here. A reader who wants that half of the comparison tested should go to that study. The claim of independent arrival is an inference from chronology and from the absence of any evidence of transmission, not a demonstration; the two courts were in permanent hostility and it is very unlikely that either was copying the other's constitutional practice, but "very unlikely" is what is being asserted.

The catalogue of ways a source of title fails — capture, compulsion, purchase, starvation, hollowing, expenditure, forking, divorce, revocation — the sorting of credentials by whether they live in an office, a person or a family, the proposition that a manufactured authority is attacked by showing the seam, and the reading of al-Qadir's 1011 assembly as an instance of that move, are all from this collection's Christendom sequence and are credited to it. This study reached the 1011 manifesto independently, from the Arabic as preserved by Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Suyuti and al-Maqrizi, and the two readings are consistent; that consistency is offered as corroboration and not as proof, since a shared framework can produce agreement without either reading being right.

The al-Andalus comparison — Córdoba's assumption of the caliphal title in 929 and the correlation between the two gold coinages and control of Sijilmasa — is from this collection's study of al-Andalus and from the numismatic literature on the trans-Saharan trade, as set out in the modules on the floor and on extraction. The Sijilmasa revenue figure remains unverifiable and is not used here.

The counter-position is stated in its own voice and is meant to be the strongest available version rather than a straw one. Its factual content is as established earlier: Ibn Killis's vizierate, the Karaite courtiers, Bahram al-Armani's tenure as a Christian vizier, the Coptic patriarchate's independent election, al-Azhar and the *Dār al-ʿIlm*, Ibn al-Haytham's work in Cairo, the fineness and reach of the coinage, the shift of the India trade, Nasir-i Khusraw's observations, and the *amān* of 969 and its keeping. The comparison with contemporary Latin Christendom is offered as the counter-position's own argument, is broadly accurate, and is not this study's verdict on either society; a fair comparison would need to be done properly and has not been done here.

The refusal to net the two columns is a methodological commitment stated in this study's brief and adopted; the argument given for it — that the people in the columns are different people, and that the columns are in places not independent because one physically produced the other — is this study's own.